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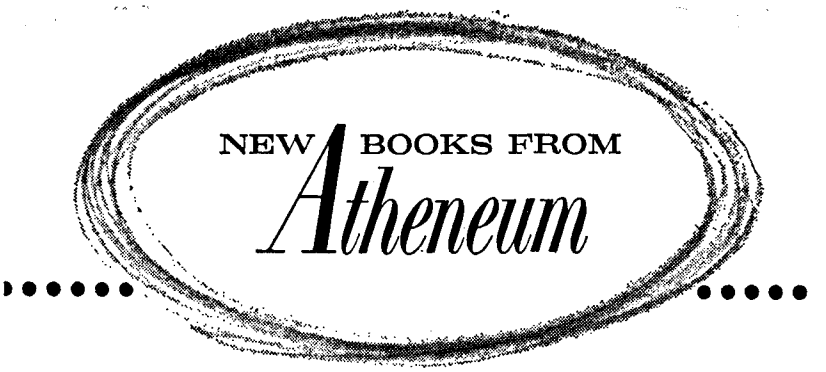

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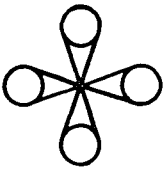

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Notes on Contributors

A new book of poems by JEAN GARRIGUE, *Country without Maps,* is to be published by Macmillan this autumn.

MARVIN MUDRICK, a regular contributor to *The Hudson Review,* teaches English at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

A book of poems by LINCOLN KIRSTEIN, *Rhymes of a Pfc,* is to be published by New Directions in October.

JACK MARSHALL's "Elegy for the New Year" will appear in *Of Poetry and Power: Poems Occasioned by the Presidency and by the Death of John F. Kennedy* (Basic Books).

MAUREEN HOWARD's story, "Sherry," is a section from her new novel, *Bridgeport Bus,* to be published early in 1965 by Atheneum.

Helmets, a book of poems by JAMES DICKEY, was published earlier this year by Wesleyan University Press.

DARYL HINE is a young poet who was born in British Columbia and now lives in Chicago. He has published three collections of verse, a novel, and a travel book (about Poland).

A collection of B. H. HAGGIN's music criticism, entitled *Music Observed,* is to be published this autumn by Oxford University Press.

IAN HAMILTON is the editor of *the Review,* an English poetry magazine published in Oxford.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT, now a Professor of English at Syracuse University, is finishing a new novel, to be entitled *In the World.*

A new poem-sequence by HAYDEN CARRUTH, *North Winter,* will be published by Prairie Press (Iowa City) in November.

J. MITCHELL MORSE is a Professor of English at Penn State and the author of *The Sympathetic Alien: James Joyce and Catholicism.*

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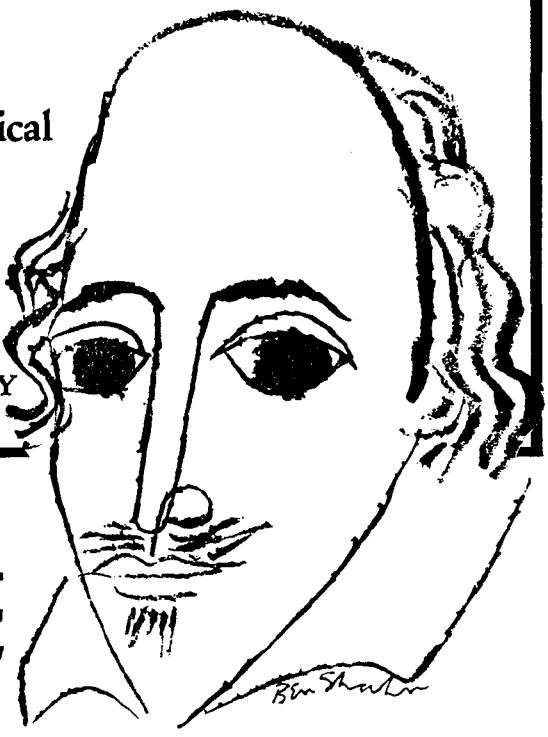

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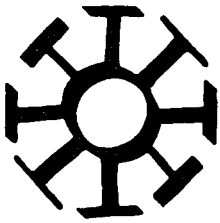

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Pays Perdu

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Old worlds of the Golden Hours.
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When the flags of the morning fly free,
It is commodious harmony,
We have fallen into some deepest relation
With self, the sense, and the world,
Being at rest strenuously
For all has form, moves with vivacious fluidity.
Then nothing that seems extraneous
From the voices of bells caught, parted and cast away
To the blazings of twenty butterflies
Bemused by a stalk of blue flowers.
As if we had composed the day
With the slumbering unseen at the back of the mind
And we neither faint nor pale.
"When we are happy we have other names."

So it was on that day in the country
When my friend and I at large in a town
Fortified in its rock above a green river
(A champing and nervous force that had cut
Whole landscapes in two in its glacier course)
Started out at the height of noon
On the broad footpath by the river
Past gardens of garlic and artichoke
And groves of olive established in tiers.
It was in Provence and by the Var
In a country of vineyards and lizards
And the fragrance of many rough herbs in bloom
St. John's Eve, almost, and yet not come,
The perfect summer essence of the year.

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Now, as we were along the way
We stopped to talk to a passerby
Who was proud to dispense the lore of the country,
A stranger herself, who spoke of a village
Far down the way, by the river, and of another
Far up in the mountains, hard if not impossible to find,
From which donkeys came down twice a week,
There being no road but a donkey track
And this track its only link with the world.
She herself had seen neither one
But she liked to think of them lurking
At the end of some straggling path. So did we,
And following her vague suggestion
That the one called Lacs, up in the mountains,
Was somewhere *down* and then *up,* set out,
Larky and confident.

This much we knew, that in an old country
That holds many bones, where life has been hard,
Where much dust of the nightingale
Is mixed with the dust of poppies
And the stubborn roots of valerian, and all
The medicinal sages,
That in an old country crossed by centuries of animals and men
There are many paths possible to take.
Foxes and dogs made them first,
Horses and donkeys succeeded.
Then the paths were secured, steps were cut out,
Walls were erected.
An old country is criss-crossed with paths,
Short cuts to the crest of a mountain.
Look at some track up the terraces
Where the olive trees doze
And you ought to know it is going somewhere.
We took one on some such faith.

And of the three-hour walk in the blaze of day
Up the snail-spiralling way of the rough country—
Scrub-oak and stone—

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And the three vertigoes when the path fell sheer
By the cliffside straight to the river
And there was white limestone dust and a chalky glare
Blinding—
and the heat—till we cooked—
And knew the beginnings of thirst—
and were lost
Or deceived by a choice of paths
So retraced our steps to a farm
Where the goat-faced owner who had been asleep
Shouted down from the upper story window
(After his dogs had barked themselves hoarse)
That if we wanted to visit a "pays perdu"
Take the fork back there to the left—

And of the way up by hawk's beak and claw
By rock horn and fang and skull,
By the death's head grin of the spurred headlands
As the path twisted inland
Broad enough at times for two donkeys
But losing us in the basil and marjolain
And long ceased the tilting groves of the olive,
"That tree of civilisation"
And long ceased the emptied-out houses and storing sheds
As we climbed on past a pine wood,
The sun glinting on their tufts and their cones
And baking the rock formations.
And into what were we going, leaving the river,
That broad boulevard, that viable thread,
To go back and into the crowded interior,
Crowded, that is, with trees and more rock and many small mountains
That engendered, for all that we knew, cockatrices. . . .
And at one turning in a medley of rubble
Meeting a child, a little girl.
Carrying a basket that had a cloth cover
Who was so startled on seeing us and hearing us speak
That we thought her a mute, she taking so long to answer
And then in a voice as if rusty from long disuse.

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This was the first stage; after that, more declivities,
More mournful ostentation of stone as we climbed
And knew thirst and passed through more deadlands
Meeting the sense of the torture of time.
History is time and it assailed us, the sight of those signs
of that static tempest that had once pressed forth those needles
of rock that once again met us, and the swirled water-marked rippled
bad-rock effects across yet another harsh breach in earth's crust
cut by the Var's tributary

And if music is the energy of time, immensely loading some quarter-hour with the compressed violence of meanings too numerous, shades too elusive striving against the iron gates and in one crazed hurl achieving the leap, so the ever continuing variations of new fantasies of rock made us laggard. Impressed us? Oppressed us. That ejaculation of rock pipes with crumbling flutings! Perches for birds or stylites, grotesque and badly botched Byzantine pillars!

And our weak shoes half in ribbons from so much pulverizing by pebbles.
And we streaked with sweat and the taste of much dryness in the mouth.
Grown over by land, by what we had seen,
Bruised by the stones white with dust and pollen,
Burnt by the sun in a mirth
Of the incurable singing of the nightingale.
For we had spied on the bird in a round bush
Though that was below, near the river.
Up here, in the miles inward, bees followed us
But not that Greek thrush. Here it was birdless,
Wildness in waste,
And the disintegrating black schist,
Porphyry headlands, beetling and angled...

And then, by a turn, roofs!
And our drouth drank of the cordial.
For here would be the douce water, casks of it, vats,

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And we dreamed up the cafe, for what town was without one,
Where we would sit, steeped in mineral water,
Citron pressé, and after that *café*
Before we'd begin on water again

But as a mountain is never the same
When you are traveling toward it,
Presenting at each turn another view of its one hundred faces
And as space itself is as deceiving,
So we lost that prospect, another turning swallowed it up,
We jogged on, thinking of donkeys
And what sort of people were they who lived so far inland
And who could ever take over these mountains?
Dense earth resisted, hail to its lordship
That would thrust us out of its holdings!
Nor by more turnings did the roofs swim back
Although we came to a bridge
Where the path broadened into a road.
Now the sky was staring with a sudden stark blue
Over the flank of a new mountain
And two or three paths coiled before us.
All was less wild, we had modulated
Into what might have been at one time subdued
By the plough, a table of land half pasture,
No longer split by the river
And we went this way and that
Attempting to skirt the shape of the land
And was it a mirage? We half joked.
Had our thirst started up a fever so soon?
Wasn't it an hour ago we had seen
The tiptilting roofs? Into what had they gone?
And how had we lost them? And should we go down,
All the way down, to the little river
Because *there* would be water, and where was the town?

Then suddenly a wheatfield
And a lane or a gulley of stones and a sharp hill
Up which we stumbled into storm blue,
The sky full of violent, crazed blue,

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And a wind rolling in the trees
By a haycock shaped like a loaf of bread
And truly the roofs and surely the water!
And we running now across the shorn field
Till we came to the first faces of houses.
The field rode up to their windows
And the shutters on them were closed
And the silence could not be more unstirred
Until we called out and black and white doves
Started up with a creak of wings
And we called again. But where were the people?
Was it inhabited by black and white doves or pigeons?

And we went around a corner, if you can call it that, between one house with its roof fallen in and one whole one and came into a courtyard with lime trees in bloom and three or four houses across the way and saw a woman, wearing a man's peaked hat and a man's shoes running with a pack of hay on her back and a woman in a big straw hat and three dogs that came at us snarling and as the wind buffeted the lime trees and the crazed blue grew stalwart we saw *this* was the town but *there* was the water running from a pipe's mouth into a tub. What a stir! for if we were apparitions to them they were not less to us, and the dogs barking for all they were worth till a man called them off and one who had been willing to hurl himself at our throats now wagging his tail as we explained how long we had been walking and—THIRST! And he pointed triumphantly to what they had an abundance of.

Then we rather crazy there at the tub, filling our hands with water,
And my friend lying prone and drinking from the pipe's mouth . . .

While bundles of hay kept flying past us on the backs of the man and woman and the one in a straw hat calling out to them in a language we had never heard to which was added the delirium of birds just before rain—swallows springing out of nowhere to shriek and to skirl and a swooping by pigeons while a battery of crows cawed by.

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And as the storm sky humped down I running out in the unearthly blue to the 'other side' of the town . . . which was likewise a field that stretched off to a mountain. But more. Much more. Where I stood was before the very birth of a chaos of definable forms. So here they were, put down in a lull, the last lull between peaks. Since to the 'back' or the 'north' stretched that beginning of the one thousand wrinkled circus-tent tops.

Till the rain came down in a blithe bluster of spears and the air was so freshened with the breath of all that seems good that the rain froze and we were peppered with a fine shot of hail and took refuge under a shed until the man who had been carrying hay asked us into his house.

And we saw, going in, a bright blue postbox at the side of his door.

And we went into the first black room
Filled with blossoms of the lime tree in gunny sacks
And loose on the floor and on a table, and into the kitchen
With an iron stove and scraps in a pan on the floor for a dog
And the woman in the peaked hat was there
With eyes that ate up her face
Nodding to us and smiling but sitting away where we could not see her,
Sitting away in a corner like a bird mewed up.
And her husband eager to do the talking
With the stub of a burnt-out cigarette
In the corner of his mouth like a sore,
Slight and not young,
His beret jammed tight to his head . . .
And he wanted to know just how we had happened to come
Because, where they were, few did
And was it true that the donkeys went down
Twice a week or more? we asked.
About that, he was vague. Yes, he had donkeys
And when the wheat was cut—
We understood then that truly at times
The donkeys went down with produce

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And returned with provisions.
And we heard of the postman who came twice a week
Five miles by the ravines and the gorges
Because there was a postbox and it was the law
Whether there was mail or not—
And of a teacher who also came
Twice a week for the one child left.
So. They were not forgotten. He voted
And they had gone to war,
His brother and cousin killed
And the rest who had gone not coming back,
Two families left now, and one child.
And Lacs had been named for a lake
That had disappeared so long ago
Not even his father's grandfather had seen it
And this house—almost as old!
They had had sheep till the shepherd had left
And years ago there had been hundreds
Sheep, that is, with their shepherds
Up from the valley to stay all summer.
In his father's day there had been horse roads
Now grown over, and the houses for lizards. . . .

He was quick and gentle in the way he spoke
Wearing a cigarette that would not stay lit
Steadfastly refusing our own.
No animal earth-spirit, weathered and contrary,
But equable, civil.
We felt that it pleased him to talk
Especially of the heroical postman
And the thistle hearts that his mother cooked
For the good that it did them
Like that herb that she swore if you put in your shoe
You could walk miles and never get tired
But he used to walk to the valley half the nights of the week.
Youth was his herb.

And of what else we talked about
As the lime blossoms trembled in the next room

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Where a wild bee stumbled and throbbed. . . .
Of the grass fire that made the bees leave
(When they kept bees) and bees won't come back
To a place that's burned
And the mushrooms and snails that came after rain
And one time, long after midnight,
The chapel bell rang and rang
And whether the wind or an animal rang it,
For the rope had worked loose, they never knew.

And the strange Lacs stirred for us
When he peopled the sides of hill,
Had carts jolting by that took wheat to a mill,
Humors of barnyards—the Gaulois cock crowing,
Goats with their niddering voices, vigors and motion
And all the desires we connect with action
Before the roofs fell and the field mice came in.
And how is it, we wanted to say,
As you gather the lime flowers to store or to sell,
Though it takes the whole heart do you labor
So close to the nerve and burn
Of the great stars in the stillness
That is as strong as sound
While he told of the fête, just at this time of year,
Of John the Baptist when a handful of men
Would go into the mountains to a "desert" there
And stay for two nights, fasting and praying,
And on the night they came back
Everyone going to meet them
With flutes and fifes and the moaning procession. . . .
And where the chapel was was just over the meadow
And what the woman spoke who wore the straw hat
Was Provençal. . . .

And the rain had long since stopped
And it was time to go
And he would not accept our cigarettes
Though there was the thought we would send him a postcard
If nothing else for the sake of the postman

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And we said our farewells and his wife smiled back
With that look not to be pitied nor understood
And out into Lacs again
We saw what we had not seen before—
Two houses stood sound and whole
And the rest toppling like hollyhocks
Or topless, with a tree gushing from a door.
And we saw how secluded and secret,
How inward a crumbling thing looks,
The eyeless ruins or the three-cornered ones.
And time not running away as in music
Nor the instant lit up with energy
But grinding and pulverizing with an idiot's patience
The rock foundations.
And it would not be stopped. It would be
As the wind and the weather would have it,
It would go down to the soundless possession
Of the rash bugles of morning glory.

And what can we do, said my friend,
Can we send them something, a gift.
They have given up, they are dying,
They are going down with the place
And this—she waved her hand
For we were passing the fields again
And the same big pigeons beating up—
Makes them indifferent. They are too much lulled
By the lull in the mountains.
And the fields swelling to the horns of green hills.
It could not be more beautiful
Nor the quality of the way it lay
In between old hills and young mountains
Could not be met again
Nor the sounding of the silence
That we would have in our ears for days.
And we passed the haycock and found the path
Leaving that phantasmal space
As if drawn for the soul to dream in
For which, once we left it, there could be no maps.

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"Pays perdu!" said the goat-faced man
And *lacs* also meant a snare made with strings
To catch birds with, as we understood—
Oh terror and beauty!

And who was to say that their souls were held
In the space here in between mountains
As the thyme and the rosemary perfume the shadows
That the great bodies cast down from their crowns?
And who was to speak of mountain flowers
That can only blossom after snow and deep frost,
Their colors intensified by the rare air,
Resisting the aridity, the cold nights, the poverty of soil,
Indeed, these very deprivations, that struggle
Being necessary for their perfection of a few days?
It was not to say this
in the great light
And the forms aloof over the serenity of ruins.

And we took the long way down
Loping along it easily in the cool of the day,
Not tormented by thirst,
As the small perfumes of earth began to be freed,
The dry-shod ferny gusts,
And shawls of blue shadow cast
On the pale green of dented slopes
Whole peaks in shadow
And whole landscapes in cloud—
"Those intricate thoughts, those elaborate emotions—"
Where at the converging of four peaks
A cloud makes a fifth.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Mailer and Styron: Guests of the Establishment

BOTH NORMAN MAILER AND WILLIAM STYRON ARE FORTY (a year more or less), just old enough to have been, as both were, very young servicemen during World War II. Between then and now, each of them published, in his middle twenties, a widely admired first novel; each in his thirties, after the interval of a single minor or transitional work, produced an elaborate shocker of a novel for a less enthusiastic audience; each has done—at least written—less than most of his readers must once have confidently anticipated; each has shown an inclination to sink his talents into journalism and literary politics, each apparently bent on retiring—as Cyril Connolly observed of Mailer—into public life. Each was regarded for some time, among a band of earnest critics, as the hope of American fiction; and, not without large plans for future novels, each seems to have settled into his appointed place as a fixture of the Establishment (*Esquire, Life, Playboy, Mademoiselle,* photos and interviews and panel discussions, New York cocktail parties and gossip columns: various combinations and permutations of which held—for almost three unanticipated years—promise of entrée to that central salon of the cultural establishment, Mrs. John F. Kennedy's White House).

The question is whether what they wrote—early or later—justified any of the fuss; and the answer is that it did. To go no further than their first books, both *The Naked and the Dead* and *Lie Down in Darkness* are remarkably skilful novels, probably the outstanding virtuoso performances of postwar American fiction. Nor did Mailer and Styron suddenly afterward lose their skill, or dissipate it in some spectacular misapplication, or renounce it like Rimbaud. What happened is sadder and more complicated, and begins, for both, at the beginning.

"I may as well confess," says Mailer (in *Advertisements for Myself*), "that by December 8th or 9th of 1941, in the forty-eight hours

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after Pearl Harbor . . . I was worrying darkly whether it would be more likely that a great war novel would be written about Europe or the Pacific"; and he records his pragmatic conviction that "it was and is easier to write a war novel about the Pacific—you don't have to have a feeling for the culture of Europe and the collision of America upon it."

So, assisted by his eventual first-hand experience in the Pacific, Mailer wrote *The Naked and the Dead.* He had calculated the odds, as well as his own abilities, correctly: there is no big novel about the European war; *The Naked and the Dead* is the only surviving big novel about either half of World War II. No other book approaches its copious documentation of that unideological, interminable, unrelievedly ugly assault on positions and places that could serve nobody except for military advantage, in a part of the world that had nothing to say to the swarms of dull strangers who systematically ravaged it. *The Naked and the Dead* is a manual of soldiering in the tropics, a compendium of tactics and expertise, a diary reverberant with authentic details, an exposé, an angry memoir, an encyclopedia of meticulously sweated-up information, a panorama and gallery of the Pacific war; everything but a novel about it.

Mailer's skill in this book is opportunistic and timely. He does not scrutinize or shape the material but rather crams it, with the energy of unilluminated ambition, into any number of pigeonholes: war as a stimulus for fine writing about death ("It was an eloquent corpse, for there were no wounds on its body, and its hands were clenching the earth as if to ask for a last time the always futile question"); America as melting-pot (Valsen, Gallagher, Minetta, Goldstein, Martinez, Czienwicz, Croft from Texas, Willie Brown from Oklahoma—the whole dreary spectrum of sectionalisms and nationalities that Mailer discriminates, in and out of their respective ghettos, more doggedly but no more individually than the shoddiest patriotic movie); the detached, self-questioning, unheroic hero ("He foresaw the annoyances, the dangers, the inevitable disillusionments, but at least this was a positive action"); the villain as wicked stepfather, the General, suave, ticking like a bomb with minatory genteel mannerisms, Fascist and latent homosexual, who (Mailer hopes) will radiate satanic corruption in his approximations of deep thinking—

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> The howitzer like a queen bee I suppose being nurtured by the common drones. The phallus-shell that rides through a shining vagina of steel, soars through the sky, and then ignites into the earth. The earth as the poet's image of womb-mother, I suppose.

If Mailer is seldom so inept (he means the General to sound like a first-class brain gone wrong), he nevertheless can seldom claim for his particulars anything better than the journalistic authority of unpenetrated experience. Characteristically, his style makes an effort to appear all toneless surface and thus a suitable medium or reflector of the material:

> After the night when the Japanese failed to cross the river, the first squad remained in its position for three days. On the fourth day, 1st Battalion advanced a half mile and recon moved up with A Company. Their new outpost was on the crest of a hill which looked down into a tiny valley of kunai grass; they spent the rest of the week digging new holes, stringing barbed wire, and making routine patrols. The front had become quiet.

But, as in this simulation of Hemingway deadpan, the style is characteristically synthetic and derivative, an echo-chamber of identifiable influences; whether James T. Farrell's Chicago-Irish dialogue (transported, stone-dead as ever, to the far Pacific):

> GALLAGHER: Some fuggin mornings like this I wish I'd catch a bullet.
> WILSON: Only goddam trouble with that is you can't pick the spot.
> STANLEY: You know if you could, the Army wouldn't be keeping me long.
> GALLAGHER: Aaah, there ain't a goddam place you can get a million-dollar wound that it don't hurt.
> STANLEY: Sometimes I think I'd lose a leg, and call it quits.

—or Fitzgerald's never-quite-focussed American daydream of youth and money:

> The last summer before college is a succession of golden days, and shining beaches, the magic of electric lights on summer evenings, and the dance band at the summer bathing club, AN AIRLINE TICKET TO ROMANTIC PLACES, and the touch and smell of young girls, lipstick odor, powder odor, and the svelte lean scent of leather on the seats of convertibles. . . .

—or the face of America as the tragic mask of history, *à la* Dos Passos:

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A big man with a shock of black hair and a small sharp voice, a heavy immobile face. His brown eyes, imperturbable, stared out coldly above the short blunted and slightly hooked arc of his nose. His wide thin mouth was unexpressive, a top ledge to the solid mass of his chin.

—or the blowsiness of Thomas Wolfe's geographical rant:

For a thousand, two thousand miles the roads and the earth have led up to it. The mountains have snubbed down to hills, lapsed into plains, rolled on majestically in leisurely convolutions and regroupings. No one ever really comprehends it, the vast table of America, and the pin points, the accretions, the big city and the iron trails leading to it.

—or John O'Hara's image of sex as the quotidian bourgeois alternative to murder:

Their lovemaking is fantastic for a time:
He must subdue her, absorb her, rip her apart and consume her.
This motif is concealed for a month or two, clouded over by their mutual inexperience, by the strangeness, the unfamiliarity, but it must come out eventually. And for a half year, almost a year, they have love passages of intense fury, enraged and powerful, which leave him sobbing from exhaustion on her breast.

—or the paid ardor of travel brochures:

The sunset was magnificent with the intensity and brilliance that can be found only in the tropics.

—or, inescapably, the huge shadow of Papa Hemingway, whenever military routine or male self-contemplation or the natural history of the dead requires to be inspected:

Another Japanese lay on his back a short distance away. He had a great hole in his intestines, which bunched out in a thick white cluster like the congested petals of a sea flower. The flesh of his belly was very red and his hands in their death throe had encircled the wound. He looked as if he were calling attention to it. He had an anonymous pleasant face with small snubbed features, and he seemed quite rested in death. His legs and buttocks had swollen so that they stretched his pants until they were the skin-tight trousers of a Napoleonic dandy. Somehow he looked like a doll whose stuffing had broken forth.

The young novelist attempts also four Conradian *tours de force,* those long sections, carefully prepared and worked up, which set out to register prodigies of reluctant physical exertion: the drag-

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ging of the antitank guns; the reconnaissance through the jungle; carrying the mortally wounded soldier back toward the coast; the climb up Mt. Anaka. But Mailer does not achieve, as Conrad can, the very taste of numb and driven endurance; the words accumulate only into a sequence of assertions, interrupted by pretty pictures:

> In the brief moment . . . [the flare] lasted, they were caught at their guns in classic straining motions that had the form and beauty of a frieze.

This footnote to the Planting of Old Glory on Iwo Jima is neither war nor fiction; but it is the sort of plummy writing into which the novel relaxes when it does not work at being sober and factual, and it helps to explain the enormous popular success of *The Naked and the Dead.*

The literary ancestry of *Lie Down in Darkness* is much simpler: Faulkner; rather, one novel by Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury.* The moribund and doomstruck Southern family, the Negro servants sustained by a primitive faith inaccessible to their masters, the incest-motif as the node and symbol of inbred blood-guilt, the continuous ranging among points of view and through layers of time not to disclose something new but obsessively to circle and recapture the already stated and known—small wonder that *Lie Down in Darkness* is one of the few twentieth-century novels which Faulkner himself publicly set apart for praise.[1] Yet Styron draws back from Faulkner's most destructive temptation, his rhetoric. Styron's prose is open, scrupulous, limber, unplagued by echoes (most unlike the tight-lipped pastiche of *The Naked and the Dead*): it modulates easily between plain narrative and lyric evocation, it can even accommodate itself to the pyrotechnic and ominous lightnings of Peyton Loftis's conclusive monologue—

> He hocked something up, spat it out the window; in the fading afternoon two young men strolling along, one with an earring, both in silk verdigris pants. *Shall Thy wrath burn like fire?* I couldn't think again, then thought flooded over me with a rustle of feathers, scraping, katydid wings: suppose. Yes. Suppose it was not like that at all, but that

[1] The praise was mild enough, to be sure ("a book . . . that I thought showed promise"); but it was the only book that Faulkner, having disclaimed competence to answer, mentioned in answer to the question (in 1957): "Mr. Faulkner, could you tell me who you think is the most promising young writer in America?" F. L. Gwynn and J. L. Blotner (editors), *Faulkner in the University,* 1959, 12f.

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> he should say you just go to hell. Suppose that turned out to be. Then I should never go home, south again, but always uptown like this, always north: and he shall never come again. I couldn't help it, with Harry going: once at night at Uncle Eddie's in the mountains, it was summer and cold and upstairs alone the katydids scared me: she closed the door, sealing me in blackness, with only my child's fearsome conscience—the alarm clock at my bedside whirring away, bright with greenly evil, luminous dots and hands. I knew nothing about birds then, or guilt, but only my fear: that I should be borne away on the wings of katydids, their bewhiskered faces that nuzzled mine and brittly crackling claws that pinched my flesh, a hum of wings overhead carrying me outward and outward and outward . . .

Nor does Styron, concerned—as in *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner is—to reconstitute the obstinate dimension of time, take for a model Faulkner's rather brutal bumping together of time-levels (as in the Benjy section, with its signpost italics). Styron's dissolving and self-restoring chronology is in fact the technical triumph of the book. It would have delighted the patriarch of the time-shift, Ford Madox Ford; in its seamless and transparent intricacy it is an astonishing feat, and would alone support a sympathetic interest in the talent and future of its creator.

If anything similar might fairly be said about Styron's plot, his characters, his scenes, the judgments he sees fit to provide, *Lie Down in Darkness* would be an impressive and substantial novel. But the plot is mere fate, a bloated india rubber spider in the toils of which the characters are these crippled buzzing flies; the scenes congeal into melodramatic suspensions, postures, tableaux (Mailer's "form and beauty of a frieze"):

> During the instant she heard that voice it seemed that time itself had stopped: nothing stirred, no leaf fell; beyond the shore the incoming waves lay without motion in piled-up billows, suspended one behind the other in endless, furrowed procession around the bay, as silent and unyielding as if they had been carved from glass. The evening wind had frozen in the trees. Below, Milton and Peyton sat like statues together, and Peyton had one hand raised to a place where sunlight had gathered in her hair. There was no sound or movement anywhere, except for the furious quick beating of Helen's heart.

Though all the fevers and miseries of spirit are intended to carry (and the dislocations of chronology to define) histories, origins, motives, moments of early purity and joy, what dominates and ex-

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pels everything else is the savored parade of effects—alcoholism, frigidity, self-abasements and humiliations, a tangle of guilts and hatreds, incest or just about. It is as if there were never anything to lapse *from*. Since there are no motives or origins, the effects are sensational, like an exact description of mangled bodies in an auto accident, or like Mailer's lingering look at battlefield carrion (the intention of the look is doubtless bitterly sardonic—anti-war—but Mailer has no characters either, and so he too commands only effects).

As for Styron's few attempts to equip his mouthpieces with prophetic optimism (" '. . . I want to paint and paint because I think that some agony is upon us. Call me a disillusioned innocent, a renegade Red, or whatever, I want to crush in my hands all that agony and make beauty come out . . .' "), they are banal enough to send us off in pursuit of mere sensation ourselves, especially when poor Peyton is made to expose the aspirations of modern youth:

> " . . . I've wanted to be normal. I've wanted to be like everybody else . . . because, Bunny, you can believe me, most kids these days are not wrong or wrongdoers, they're just aimless and lost . . . "

Lie Down in Darkness has nothing more to say, and says it with an extraordinary battery of fictional devices. Like *The Naked and the Dead*, it is an accomplished, even a brilliant book by a gifted and ambitious writer, who knows that to be what he is determined to be—a successful and respected novelist—it is necessary to write novels.

Certainly nothing but ambition can account for Styron's second book. *The Long March* is a novella, extended by generous type and margins into a scant volume, about an incident among Marine reserves called back into service during the Korean war. Here is a sample of the kind of women's-magazine shorthand that Styron will settle for when he feels no impulse at all, only the need to keep his name before the public:

> A flood of protest had welled up in him, for he had put the idea of war out of his mind entirely, and the brief years since Okinawa had been the richest of his life. They had produced, among lesser things, a loving, tenderly passionate wife who had passed on to their little girl some of her gentle nature and her wealth of butter-colored hair; a law degree, the fruits of which he had just begun to realize, even though somewhat impecuniously, as one of the brightest juniors in a

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> good New York law firm; a friendly beagle named Howard whom he took for hikes in Washington Square; a cat, whom he did not deign to call by name, and despised; and a recordplayer that played Haydn, Mozart and Bach.

Mailer, who likes to comment on his contemporaries, has written that *The Long March* is "remarkably good." His only ascertainable reason must be that it is a sort of compliment to him. The whole action of the novella resembles a hasty first draft of any one of the four episodes of intolerable physical stress in *The Naked and the Dead;* as in Mailer's novel, military reality is faced up to, the messier the better ("the slick nude litter of intestine and shattered blue bones"); the villain is Mailer's General Cummings demoted to a Marine lieutenant-colonel named Templeton, who like Cummings subtly flaunts a couchful of neurotic mannerisms as he utters the starchy periods of comic-book villainy:

> "Wait a minute, Captain, wait a minute," the Colonel said. Once more the voice—as cool and as level as the marshy ground upon which they were sitting—carefully skirted any tone of reproach and was merely explicit: "I don't want you to think I'm taking it out on the Battalion merely because of you, or rather H & S Company. But they aren't reserves. They're *marines. Comprend?*" He arose from the chair. "I think," he went on flatly, almost gently . . .

Only Captain Mannix, the rebellious Jew from Brooklyn, is not out of Mailer's bag of tricks; but the virile and unpretentiously heroic Jew is a counter-cliché that Styron has already used in *Lie Down in Darkness* (Peyton's husband): the circumstances differ, and therefore the reactions, but the same type-cast actor could play both parts.

Barbary Shore, on the other hand, is a difficult and sizable effort, and in fresh directions for Mailer. At least—after the all-bets-covered caution of *The Naked and the Dead*—it may be said to have the crude look of chance-taking and exploration. Its Dostoievskian plot combines conspiratorial politics with detective-novel concealments and surprises; its ethos is the febrile and despairing utopianism of lost causes; it plunges with naïve rashness into argument, polemic, tirade, prophecy; its style has withdrawn from Mailer's early influences and is already assuming the constricted, anxious, hectoring intonation of most of Mailer's writing after *The Naked and the Dead;* its narrator, deprived by amnesia of background and

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blood-ties, is Mailer's new hero, the individual outside history, the unmemoried anonymous American, the orphan, the unrelated man, who starts from nowhere with nothing and must somehow manage to understand, in time, the unexampled predicament of the world. Moreover, against all these lowering clouds, Mailer comes up with Guinevere, the gorgeous sloven who daydreams in uninhibited technicolor:

> "It takes place in this city in New York State, and the main characters are a doctor, a real good-looking guy with a mustache, big you know, and his nurse, she looks like some of those blonde stars, and then he's got a girl friend, a dark-haired girl, any feature player could do that part." Guinevere lit a cigarette. "Now, this guy, the doctor, he's a pretty good guy, good heart and so forth, and he's a wow with the women. He's got the biggest whang on him in the whole town, and maybe he don't know it. He's got dozens of girl friends, and there isn't one of them who won't surrender herself to him, you know. . . ."
>
> . . . "The operation turns out a failure. She isn't going to have the baby any more but at the same time he does something, he makes a mistake, and the society girl can't make love any more. She looks perfectly okay, but she's crippled there, a beautiful girl, and yet she can't do it any more. Well, when she finds out, she's mad, and she's going to expose him, but the nurse who's a wonderful character convinces him he ought to marry the society girl and he does even though there can't be anything between them, and for a while they all keep living in the same town, and he keeps up his affair with the blond nurse. They're still in love, and it's gotten very chemical like it used to be with the society girl, he goes down on her and everything, and she loves him. . . ."

Having outlined this script for a smash movie she hopes the narrator will "write up" for her, Guinevere soon disappears into the turbid puzzles of the plot (unfortunately, since she might have been the heroine of a mean and brassy novel). After all, with the best of intentions, *Barbary Shore* is melodrama. Mailer's vision of the police-state in America has the necessary props and actors: the revolutionary, the disciple, the unwitting betrayer (the girl, no less! who introduced, or crazily fancies she introduced, the assassin to Trotsky), the secret policeman, the "little object" which becomes the emblem of hope for the world when the disciple—the man without a past—inherits it and so inherits a possible future. Apart from Guinevere, however, Mailer's inventiveness is absorbed and exhausted by the scheme of his subject, which thereupon gen-

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erates its own stock of platitudes. The nasty cop, for instance, is predictably identified by momentous crumbs of stage-business:

> "I wonder," Hollingsworth began, "if you have come to a favorable decision on my offer?" and expectorated neatly into his handkerchief.

And so is the revolutionary:

> With what effort he replaced his eyeglasses, adjusted them upon his nose. "It is Hollingsworth then," he whispered incomprehensibly.

The best Mailer can do to imply the anguish of the heroine is to set her adrift on currents of whimsy:

> "This morning I woke up, and I thought of all the dresses I had, and my typewriter, and all those little chains. I'm a cat. I don't want strings to my legs. I gave them away to Father Pawnbroker." She smiled. "Like Vincent I cut off my ear and gave it to my beloved and now I hear sounds I never knew before."

Nor does the politics ever distinguish itself from romatic pamphleteering:

> " . . . it is impossible for you to know the excitement I felt that night on the bridge when I heard you talk with precision enough for me to realize that here was one of the young generation with a socialist culture . . . "

Finally, the narrator-hero, for all his busy ubiquitousness, is a stick: Mailer ought perhaps to have heeded one of the ancient unwritten laws of fiction, that a first-person hero tends either to get in the way or to recede into the wallpaper (even Dickens had his troubles of perspective and proportion with the protagonist who speaks for everyone else as well as for himself).

In *The Deer Park*, Mailer has no better luck with a similar narrator-hero at the source and center of the action: again the orphan, the free and unrelated man, the voluntary agent; and again a stick. This time, though, the failure is more damaging because the hero is seeking not a political but a personal apocalypse. The existential dynamo has shifted its base of operations from revolutionary socialism (Mailer regards *Barbary Shore* as his first "existential" novel) to revolutionary sex. The capital question now is the question of personality—outward index of the potency that must transform us all:

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> Almost everybody I knew in Desert D'Or had had an unusual career, and it was the same for me. I grew up in a home for orphans. Still intact at the age of twenty-three, wearing my flying wings and a First Lieutenant's uniform, I arrived at the resort with fourteen thousand dollars, a sum I picked up via a poker game in a Tokyo hotel room while waiting with other fliers for our plane home. The curiosity is that I was never a gambler, I did not even like the game, but I had nothing to lose that night, and maybe for such a reason I accepted the luck of my cards. Let me leave it at that. I came out of the Air Force with no place to go, no family to visit, and I wandered down to Desert D'Or.

"Built since the Second World War," Sergius O'Shaugnessy continues, "it is the only place I know which is all new." So the new man takes up the challenge of the new city, which as it not accidentally happens is the retreat and playground of the Hollywood illustrious. There is an American myth which is a long time dying: Fitzgerald believed it, Mailer believes it, Styron in *Set This House on Fire* tries hard to be cynical or wise but believes it: that Hollywood—enameled smirk and all—holds the keys to the ultimate arcanum of sex. Sergius, then, is the toothpaste-ad knight ("I had blond hair and blue eyes and I was six-feet one") in quest of this oldest and latest and most American sacred mystery.

The myth is a myth of power. It rests on the assumption that the Hollywood amalgam of forces—technical, personal, organizational—which alters, distorts, reshapes, imprisons the sexual consciousness of millions must itself be a reservior of sexual power, a sort of Catharist cell whose holy heretics practice rites forbidden and unimaginable to the laity. The myth has had much highbrow currency recently (consider the posthumous deification of Marilyn Monroe). It was anticipated by Fitzgerald in *The Last Tycoon,* a pretentious and sentimental fragment which fails to prove that a man who skilfully makes bad movies can be intelligent, interesting, and a (somewhat depleted) reservior of sexual power. Perhaps the only satisfactory fictional treatment of the myth has been Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer.* The protagonist of this notably unpretentious novel is the conscious, willing, and sardonic victim of the myth, the American who accepts the fate that for Americans the movies are realer than life:

> I am attracted to movie stars but not for the usual reasons. I have

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no desire to speak to Holden or get his autograph. It is their peculiar reality which astounds me.

That the convergent egos of hundreds of technicians, bookkeepers, press-agents, and ill-trained players in a film on view in thousands of theaters will necessarily affect the dreams of millions is obvious. Mr. Percy merely proposes that the "realness" of Bill Holden and his colleagues is relative, a testimony not to any vitality of theirs but to the national void which their images—factitious tokens of sense, touch, unaging sinless flesh—rush to fill. The cult of youth and of the unaging body is not identical with—it may indeed preëmpt and nullify—the cult of sex. It may express only the national hatred for mind, for the past, for unillusioned love, for all the fumbling cravens—ourselves—who will never make the team, climb the ladder of success, marry the boss's daughter. Revenge! cries the thinned blood. Ah, to build and consummate the dreams of all our envious brothers in thousands of darkened auditoriums, as Sergius can do in his bouts with the movie goddess, Lulu Meyers:

I was able to discover emotions I never knew I owned, and I must have enjoyed it as much as Lulu. So I thought by virtue of the things we did I would put my mark on her forever. What she may have intended as a little dance was a track and field event to me, and I would snap the tape with burning lungs, knotted muscles, and mind set on the need to break a record. It was the only way I could catch her and for three minutes keep her. Like a squad of worn-out infantrymen who are fixed for the night in a museum, my pleasure was to slash tapestries, poke my fingers through nude paintings, and drop marble busts on the floor. Then I could feel her as something I had conquered, could listen to her wounded breathing, and believe that no matter how she acted other times, these moments were Lulu, as if her flesh murmured words more real than her lips. To the pride of having so beautiful a girl was added the bigger pride of knowing that I took her with the cheers of millions behind me. Poor millions with their low roar. They would never have what I had now. They could shiver outside, make a shrine in their office desk or on the shelf of their olive-drab lockers, they could look at the pin-up picture of Lulu Meyers. I knew I was good when I carried a million men on my shoulder.

"Emotions I never knew I owned": what these emotions are, Sergius will not tell us. If the contest almost kills him, his consolation is that to win it would be to win everything; yet what he would win, beyond Lulu, is not clear. And, though Lulu's magnetic charms are tirelessly asserted, in illustration they soon wane:

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" 'Sugar, get me a small Martin' " or—"When Lulu finally came back, she perched on my lap and said in a whisper the others could hear, 'Sugar, I tried, and I couldn't make doo-doo. Isn't that awful? What should I eat?' "; or—

> We played our games. I was the photographer and she was the model; she was the movie star and I was the bellhop; she did the queen, I the slave. We even met even to even. The game she loved was to play the bobby-soxer who sat with a date in the living room and was finally convinced, always for the first time naturally enough.

Now Mailer is not writing, approvingly or satirically, about debauchery in Bel-Air. He is writing, so he plainly thinks, about a mystery, an occult ceremony, as between Eitel and Elena:

> For Eitel, who had decided more than once that when all was said, not too many women really knew how to make love, and very few indeed loved to make love, Elena was doubly and indubitably a find. He had blundered on a treasure. It was one of the best experiences of his life.

The mystery, like Lulu's charms, is never revealed but always asserted. If its practitioners—foggy vectors of unspecified energy—were otherwise entertaining or intelligent, we might credit their practice; but the rest are as pneumatically monotonous as Lulu. Potency without personality is like the smile without the Cheshire cat. Sergius himself, appointed by Mailer to survey the mystery, is a grand lacuna into which whole chapters topple and vanish. It is chiefly when Mailer forgets the mystery for a moment and does some tough local satire—on the movie producers, for instance—that the novel has the ring of at least minor truth. Marion Faye, on the other hand—pimp, diabolist, spoiled priest, dark herald of Mailer's approaching dawn of polymorphous-perverse sexuality—is so patently derived from any one of Dostoievsky's agonized nihilists that he seems a quaint keepsake rather than corrosively modern.

As for Styron (who had written to Mailer, "I don't like *The Deer Park,* but I admire sheer hell out of it"), he makes plain, in *Set This House on Fire,* that *The Deer Park* imposed on him the moral obligation to put Mailer straight about some important matters. It is true that he has his own breathless fling with the Hollywood myth:

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> There was an indescribable grace and attractiveness about this man [a movie director], and there is hardly any way I can outline these qualities without feeling that I am being stale and pedestrian. . . . There was something powerfully sensual about him (I felt Rosemarie come electrically alive at his approach, somewhat I should say, like a mare) . . .

He also concocts, for his own didactic purposes, his own version of Marion Faye. Mason Flagg is comparable to Faye not only in his name; like Faye, he chooses to direct his life down a corridor of titillatingly infamous possibilities. The difference is that Styron altogether disapproves of Flagg; and of Faye, and Mailer. Mailer having been reckless enough to speak for himself—

> There was a frontier for my generation of novelists. Coming out of the orgy of the war, our sense of sex and family was torn in two. The past did not exist for us. We had to write our way out into the unspoken territories of sex—there was so much there, it was new, and the life of our talent depended upon going into the borderland . . .

and having elsewhere called sex "perhaps the last remaining frontier of the novel," Styron sets out to demonstrate that Mailer's notions are foolish and wicked; that Flagg, seductive though he is to all who meet him (if not to the reader), has no marvelous secret, heralds no future, is a mendacious and dirty-minded idler whose appropriation of Mailer's metaphor clinches his equivalence with Mailer as well as with Faye:

> "Sex meant a lot to Mason—more than any human being I ever laid eyes on. That pornography of his, for instance. What he always was talking about was the new look in morals—that's what he called it—and this business about sex being the last frontier. . . . He wanted all the arts to embrace complete, explicit sexual expression—I'm quoting him. He said that pornography was a liberating force, *épater le bourgeois,* and all that crap—though Mason was deep down the most dyed-in-the-wool bourgeois who ever walked. . . . "

Whatever the merits of Styron's argument (spoken by his purged and beatified hero), Styron's villain in his own novel is a simple machine, so instantaneously comprehensible that he poses a threat only to the reader's attention: " '. . . I've heard that a man hasn't even begun to *savor* life, until he's had one of these native girls moaning *mamma mia* to him in the sack. . . .' " Moreover, Styron's alternative to life on Mailer's frontier is rural domesticity

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with a wife whose womanly capacity for affection (which Styron and his hero announce at every opportunity) is matched only by her total brainlessness: " '. . . Every time I pick up the paper I read about some American hitting some Italian with his car. I think it's just a shame the way people drive around in these irresponsible American cars. . . . ' " The same novelist had an earlier heroine cry out in a moment of truth: " '. . . I've wanted to be normal. I've wanted to be like everybody else. . . . ' " If Styron is in search of "the most dyed-in-the-wool bourgeois who ever walked," he might look closer to home than the character (and rival novelist) he singles out.

While Styron keeps a cold eye on other people's morals, his novel slips off into iniquities of its own. In *Lie Down in Darkness,* Styron was content to be influenced principally by Faulkner's theme and subject; now he deluges us with cataracts of neo-Faulknerian rhetoric:

> . . . dreams that told him that God was not even a lie, but worse, that He was weaker even than the evil He created and allowed to reside in the soul of man, that God Himself was doomed, and the landscape of heaven was not gold and singing but a space of terror which stretched in darkness from horizon to horizon. Such a man knew the truth and, knowing it, would take the best way out. Which was to remove from this earth all mark and sign and stain of himself, his love and his vain hope and his pathetic creations and his guilt, and be duped by life no longer.

If such rodomontade fails to hold our interest, Styron can always rely on novelistic chewing-gum: "In the oddest way I was reminded . . . "; ". . . the strange thing was . . . "; "Then I saw a remarkable thing happen"; "bright ineffable glamour"; "Her voice was incredibly sweet. . . "; "indescribable grace"; "unutterably weary"; "I vaguely sensed . . . "; "for some reason . . . "; "For God knows what obscure reasons. . . ." Upon such phrases the final judgment has been made by F. R. Leavis (speaking of a similar habit in Conrad): that the writer "must here stand convicted of borrowing the arts of the magazine-writer (who has borrowed his, shall we say, from Kipling and Poe) in order to impose on his readers and on himself, for thrilled response, a 'significance' that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce. The insistence betrays the absence, the willed 'intensity' the nullity.

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He is intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means."[2]

Styron is, it may be concluded, no great moralist. *Set This House on Fire* is a safe and unctuous movie spectacular in the guise of a serious novel. It leaps nimbly from sensation to sensation—a bloody auto accident, a rape, a horrible disfiguring murder, a ghastly natural death in thrilling color, to mention a few—for all of which there will of course be an accounting, but oh what fun while they last, till over everything Styron can pour his shiny final lacquer of regeneration. The novel even has a part for an unutterably beautiful and virtuous Italian peasant girl, who must die so that the hero, having dallied with her (innocently!), can return to his imbecile spouse for the happy ending. It is an ignoble book.

It is the sort of book that Mailer seems incapable of writing. His literary vices do not include sanctimoniousness. He is even insecure, he shouts at us and yearns for our approval, he is childish but not ignoble. *Advertisements for Myself* is a lumpish, blundering book full of self-pity, without a single achieved piece of writing (except for a very brief, astringent fable about Hollywood, "Great in the Hay"). It is a grotesquely self-indulgent anthology: it makes room for juvenilia that could be of interest only to a Ph.D. candidate doing a thesis on Mailer; it reprints lengthy selections from his second and third novels; it reprints a number of professionally tidy short stories in the voiceless (or many-voiced) prose of *The Naked and the Dead;* it even reprints some of Mailer's political journalism, and presumably would have reproduced his laundry bills if the publisher had not called a halt somewhere. Yet about a quarter of it—mostly the running commentary throughout and the last quarter of the text—is as fascinating page by page as it is exasperating and disappointing. Such fluency, urgency, anxiety—such an energetic compulsion to be the conscience of our time—must somehow merge into form and radiance; or so it is possible to feel as one reads.

And there are still new programs to explore. In "The White Negro" and "The Time of Her Time," the existential focus has narrowed from sex in general to the orgasm in particular. In "The White Negro," Mailer describes the pursuit of the orgasm as it evolves into the new mystery of hip, the Negro mystique liberated

[2]F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition,* Anchor, New York, 1954, 219.

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from the white man's tyranny over the dark places of his own psyche; the revolution from within. In "The Time of Her Time" (which according to Mailer is a fragment of a novel in progress), Mailer's by now furiously baroque prose presents, in imagery reminiscent of the dragging of the antitank guns though the jungle in *The Naked and the Dead,* the efforts of a hipster Don Juan to induce an orgasm in the frigid girl he has accepted as worthy of his talents. The prose shudders with high-minded evangelical fervor; for Mailer is a very moral writer, with his own strict ideas of heroism:

> Like a child on a merry-go-round the touch of the colored ring just evaded the tips of her touch, and she heaved and she hurdled, arched and cried, clawed me, kissed me, even gave of a shriek once, and then her sweats running down and her will weak, exhausted even more than me, she felt me leave and lie beside her. Yes, I did that with a tactician's cunning, I let the depression of her failure poison what was left of her will never to let me succeed, I gave her slack to mourn the lost freedoms and hate the final virginity for which she fought, I even allowed her baffled heat to take its rest and attack her nerves once more . . .

The style—this lethal competition with one's material—defeats and parodies itself, sinks into narcissism, bellybutton lint-picking. Such puritanical zeal has not been seen in American fiction since *The Scarlet Letter;* but it was Hawthorne's subject, not his style, and he did not make the mistake of drowning in it.

What remains is the "Prologue to a Long Novel," with which Mailer ends the book, and in which he announces his most recent program: not politics, not sex, not orgasm—but orgy as the existential cul-de-sac, the brick wall against which the ego can batter itself to death and transcendence. Mailer has often expressed his admiration for Sade, and in this Prologue his self-identification with the divine Marquis is complete; or would be, if only Mailer could cease to be so nervously attentive to his readers:

> . . . that mob of readers whose experience of life is as narrow as it is poor, and worse if the truth be told . . .
>
> For those readers courage is required. My passion is to destroy innocence, and any of you who wish to hold to some part of that warm, almost fleshly tissue of lies, sentimentality, affectation and ignorance which the innocent consider love must be prepared instead for a dissection of the extreme, the obscene and the unsayable.

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There follows much portentous promise of dreadful things to come, hints and warnings, extravagant premonitory images. It all provokes feelings like Tolstoy's amused reaction to the sensational stories of Andreyev. Tolstoy recalled "the story about a boy who, unable to pronounce the letter 'r,' said to his chum: 'I went for a walk and suddenly I saw a wolf. . . . Are you fwightened? Are you fwightened?' 'So Andreyev,' continued Tolstoy, 'also keeps on asking me: "Are you fwightened?" And I am not in the least frightened.' "[3]

Mailer's novel may get done and published; it may even be good, though there seems every reason—including the two excerpts printed in *Advertisements for Myself*—to be skeptical.[4] In his time Mailer may have seen a wolf or two; but anyone so fluttery about the sensibilities of an audience is unlikely to give a useful account of his adventures in the deep forest. Mailer's ambition to be heard is undermined by his anxiety; it may in fact be just another name for anxiety. *Set This House on Fire* is ambitious too, a bad ambitious novel, anxious to inflame and impress, full of cardboard wolves with grinning teeth. But Styron's manners—if not his methods—are much more ingratiating than Mailer's. Mailer has written angrily about Styron's campaign to smooth the way for his shocker: "Styron . . . spent years oiling every literary lever and power which could help him on his way, and there are medals waiting for him in the mass-media." Those are medals that Mailer had for a season and still pitifully craves. It is not Styron's ambition that Mailer deplores, but the social graces with which he pursues it: if not in the genial valleys of mass esteem (accessible, in the twentieth century, only to a Frost or a Hemingway, and only under very special conditions), at any rate on the peaks of the Establishment—to live as a gentleman-novelist unsoiled by one's work, to have been called Bill by the First Lady and, during those years, to have mingled in the Green or Blue Room with the other certified celebrants of a New Frontier rather different from Mailer's. If only America would include *me*! cried Mailer, in his agony of un-

[3] Ernest J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, Vintage Books, New York, 1960, Vol. II, 347.

[4] *An American Dream*, recently serialized in *Esquire*, is not the promised novel. Mailer seems to have attempted, in this diversion, to make indelible all the defects of his style and imagination; it reads like Frank Sinatra's memoirs ghost-written by Anaïs Nin. It is so absolute a fiasco that one hopes, without confidence, that it was done only for money.

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requitable love for the Far Princess and the Hollywood America of his peevish dreams:

> . . . there was a way she could show us she was beginning to learn, it was the way of the hostess: one would offer her one's sword when Henry Miller [not to mention Norman Mailer] was asked to the White House as often as Robert Frost . . . [and] Archibald MacLeish. . . .

For Mailer's myth of America is the old Hollywood myth again, a myth of power. "I want to know how power works," Mailer once said to his friend James Baldwin, "how it really works, in detail." And the rejoinder that Baldwin, as a Negro, made for himself is one that Mailer cannot accept: "Well, I know how power works," says Baldwin, "it has worked on me, and if I didn't know how power worked, I would be dead. And it goes without saying, perhaps, that I have simply never been able to afford myself any illusions concerning the manipulation of that power. My revenge, I decided very early, would be to achieve a power which outlasts kingdoms."

In such a power, neither Mailer nor Styron believes. Mailer's true belief has its comic, or possibly deranged, aspect. He appears to have quite seriously contemplated running for Mayor of New York, till a marital contretemps that made the tabloids removed him from the race. He has written on several occasions that his article on Kennedy, which was published in *Esquire* a few weeks before the 1960 election, may well have swung that election. In reply to a polite complimentary letter from Mrs. Kennedy ("the Catholic wife," as he afterward ruefully reminded himself, "of a Catholic candidate for President"), Mailer expansively wrote that he "hoped one day . . . to do a biography of the Marquis de Sade and the 'odd strange honor of the man' "; and their correspondence ended. Mailer's obsession with Mrs. Kennedy, however, did not end; he continued to write about her, and in an open letter to her husband soon after the Cuban crisis of 1962 he demanded that the President show his good faith during any future crisis by dispatching his family to the prime target, New York: "Why not send us a hostage? Why not let us have Jacqueline Kennedy?"

There must be power somewhere, power to do if not to do good, in Washington and Hollywood; and Mailer has seemed on the verge, now and then, of comprehending the relation between

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these North and South Poles of the torn and convulsive American psyche:

> Jack Kennedy understood that the most important, probably the only dynamic culture in America, the only culture to enlist the imagination and change the character of Americans, was the one we had been given by the movies. Therefore a void existed at the center of American life. No movie star had the mind, courage or force to be a national leader, and no national leader had the epic adventurous resonance of a movie star.
>
> So the President nominated himself. He would fill the void. He would be the movie star come to life as President.

"Politics," says Mailer, "even practical politics, has roots in a mystery, in that part of the mystery which contains sex, death, dread, courage, and intimations of waste and growth." No doubt. But a mystery can be exploited, cheapened, stamped out by those who merely conduct its ceremonies. Power may, in the decrepitude of mystery, be whatever fills the void; the nominal charisma of title and office may belong to whoever, having accurately forecast the lowest ebb of the national capacity to resist, moves in to claim the unoccupied places of power; moves in, perhaps, without having heeded the unexpended public madness that, in a time of parthenogenetic heroes, moves with him into the great vacancy.

Perhaps the need—certainly once a possible goal—of the novelist is to have power beyond the keepers of title and office, to be the acknowledged voice and conscience of his time, like Dickens or Tolstoy; perhaps the doom of the contemporary American novelist is that at best he can sit at the tables of the mighty, scrambling for crusts. Meanwhile, he lives for the day of the big review and the months of the best-seller. Mailer tells us how he lived only on the hope that the sales of *The Deer Park* would crack one hundred thousand; and he reports that Styron was embittered by the failure of *Lie Down in Darkness* "to make him a household word in America." Dickens and Tolstoy had power; for the novelist now, only popularity is possible; and money—for the novelist, as for the movie star—is the index of popularity. A novelist presents, creates, with unprecedented detail and amplitude, the community, society, nation, collective will he lives in and has nightmares about. Is it surprising that to be ignored by what he has brought into being is an indignity which, once he has spent his arrogant youth, mauls

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and unhinges his individual will? If the American novelist does his best work in his twenties and early thirties (as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner did; as Styron and Mailer, so far, have done), the reason may be that there is no room for him in the desperately unconscious and platonic country of his invention, America, the country in which everything sooner or later dematerializes into the abstractions of money and the oblivions of violence and random coupling. Mailer, like other broken idealists, is trying to pretend that the country of his invention is also—at least in becoming, in the pure oxygen of some pan-hipster future—the country of his desire; that it *must* be—else what will he have to write about? and for whom will he write? The First Lady declined to notice his Napoleonic letter; and the public, which does not read him, will never even learn that it is expected to reply.

Styron, defeated as a novelist, has coldly chosen the garden path to the drawing-rooms of the Establishment. One may suspect that he knew all along where he was heading and what it took to get there: talent, but not too vigorously exhibited; style, without bite or intelligence; supine moralities momentarily illuminated by sulphur and brimstone. If Mailer has gone the same way, at least he has entertained us kicking and screaming and ruffling the languid nerves of his hostesses: the terrible infant who can still offend, and may yet carry off some of the silverware, and is therefore more attractive to those outside than the stony proprietors and docile guests of the Establishment. For the critic, however, the distinction may not be worth making.

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LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

U. N.

Our city sleeps below
Fifty-five storeys of office, bureau.
A lone armed-guard in starched chinos, grey,
Hums passively, sighs, hums; waits for a next new day
When he'll be off-duty. Black water hundreds of feet down
Recall still another northern locale, the clean canal town
Where he was born, raised, found his vocation. There & then
He volunteered for service in the U.N.

Service, to worlds of men,
A great wide world past Stockholm, past Sweden,
Past Europe, past lines in books, on maps
Into diagrams where he thought some chaps
Might get together to arrange politics rather well
To make chancey peace probable; better than possible hell;
Well-born, well-bred after a fading feudal fashion
He serves here without question or much passion,

And it's a good thing too.
Leave passion to those, floors below, who
Play at power. He does as he can;
Nobody is storming up here to harm a man
Guarding air-conditioners which keep comfortably cool
Air, subtracting irritation from patriot, statesman, fool.
This justifies idle watches of a stranger's night
Waiting for a new-learned skyline to take light.

On the 38th floor
Lit like noon, cables and typists explore
The Secretary-General's place,
Also a Swede,—diplomat with a horsey face,
A quizzical thoroughbred. Abrupt pace of warmth and mind
Doing what he can do, is bound to do; planning: can he find
Deals with naive American, furious French, fierce Russ,
Africans? To try what's best for all of us

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Through this, his last, best, hope?
Neither last nor best but having to cope
With men and machinery, what to do?
It beats me. About half the time it beat him too.
Half the time he loved the game for itself: machines and men
Jumping like short-circuited beetles on again, off again.
Last? Best? At least the last dreamed here below to make work
It out a bit better, a one none can shirk

Least of all Hammarskjöld
Who imagines it as a rough household
With him the janitor or tutor;
He prime fuse or spark, at once shrewd slave and suitor
To naughty children; some cretin, spoiled or malformed; others
Hiding hints of hope. A few might almost be normal brothers.
Certainly not an unworthy nor a senseless dream,
He scheming better than most so sound a scheme,

Seeking always for tone
Or style, his style and maybe his alone
Based on a considerate manner
Not subtle nor flashy: plain sense of a planner,
At once courtly, correct. At root, perhaps, hasty or vain;
He wished to wield good-will as defined by what he saw as sane.
Reason. If not reason, just what is possible then?
Possibly the inexact end of us men.

He showed me the U.N.
Once. He was often very content when
He could display its new ornament;
A patron's eye adorning his clean monument.
He liked fine pictures; tastes of his time were his private taste;
Nothing outlandish. He hung work by Braque, Gris, Matisse. We faced
His latest acquisition. He nudged me in alone
So I could view a huge slice of smooth black stone.

His Meditation-Room:
Good-taste in liberal religious gloom.

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Tabletop polished; altar? Maybe;
This hewn natural hunk he wished us all to see,
Harder than any hard terrestrial substance yet known,-
Irreducible mineral granitic meteor flown
From outer-space; hauled here at unusual expense,
A personal friend's benign extravagance.

This massive concrete Thing
Whose indestructible solid should bring
All wicked bickerers, tribe or clan
To an hard potential in a soft creature, man.
Hammarskjöld, poet and preacher, incarnated this fact;
One can meditate forever on irreducible act
Of softness and hardness: sly resistant or spry weak.
As symbol his slab seemed at once bland and bleak.

What the problems were, he
Knew. He tried to learn if we'd ever be
Willing to know. Then, he was my guide
To where a meagre bronze-plaque read to coincide
With the fate of another Scandinavian we ought
To, though few do, remember: peaceful, stubborn Folke-Bernadotte.
Here we measured on the all but blank white plaster wall
Was plenty of room for bronze plaques to us all.

Dag's half-grin; unhappy.
In the elevator, his kind snappy
Kidding of the tannish (Indian?
Uzbek? African?) girl; her elevator-fan
Buzzing coolness, clicking up fifty-five storeys to where
Waits our friend and patient guard sitting unexpectantly there.
Sometimes, Hammarskjöld drops by for a late call up here,
Lights up long nights with brief words of Swedish cheer.

I saw how tired he was.
In his car later, he invoked the laws
Of modern painting, music and verse
Promising next year's Nobel Prize for St. John Perse.

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When everyone howled, disgusting sounds frequently heard
He sought to sweeten them in his own ear with some well-wrought
word
Yet never succeeded. Even then he seemed in pain
And I feared I might never see him again.

Nor did I. When the news
Spread through fast confusion what could one choose
Between versions? In Africa's night
A plane humming, hunting, haunting a space, a right
Place to set down. Fasten your seat-belt. Disturbance ahead
Or fire. Leaden half-seconds before fans fail, systems go dead.
Dead, with his secretary and Swedish guards. They all
Have their full names on small plaques in a bare hall.

JACK MARSHALL

Elegy for the New Year

I
Drugged by the news, all day I keep behind
The curtains of my room. Not cork-lined,
It will have to do in holding the mind
From falling through the air like a leaf.
The year tapers to a close.
This is the legendary season
When the young die sooner than the old.

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2
Calm as a hurricane's eye,
My T.V. set, in black and white,
Stares, unblinking, at Washington—
Pearly, spacious, dazzled with shock—
Where under a sky of cold
Lingering Confederate grey,
A stallion, Black Jack, tosses
And snorts, spirited as your soul
Gone from this world, ours by default.

3
America stops turning over her conscience,
Halved these hundred years like Hamlet's,
And clutches her flag's reopened wound
Running red through the bandages.
In a sky swept clean of cherry blossoms,
She seems to see a future drained
Of all color but black and white.
White Christmas come,
The Union will twinkle
Like a child, her arms full of gifts,
Pretending all is well.

4
Someone has dreamed his father dead,
And stepped away from the dream, holding
His breath like a shoe in each hand;
Comes to himself, a honeycomb of fear,
Each cell a nursery weeping for home,
And hears the wind tiptoe from door to door,
whispering,
"There is no place to be homesick for. You're free."
Soul winging like a gunshot
Through the ether's paper bag,
Beyond sight, beyond recognition . . . breaking apart,
You wring an old restlessness from me,
Heart all aflutter for the take-off.

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MAUREEN HOWARD

Sherry

During the war I began to come to New York two or three times a year to visit my cousin Sherry. New York as I knew it with Sherry has nothing to do with my life now. Returning years later, I am still a novice in the city. Her world was constructed of distorted pieces of time: work-a-day nights, supper at dawn, dreams in the afternoon—toast, coffee, and a quick shower in the evening.

The only way my cousin and her friends ever let on that they *knew the moon still drew the tides, that the stars still moved in the* heavens—not on 45th Street—was in their devotion to the big aluminum sun lamp under which they "took five." When the girls came back to Sherry's after the last show in whatever club or chorus line they were working, they all—except Sally, the Negro singer—had a go at the big bulb. As I watched, hunched and happy in my corner, there was always a lovely body smeared with oil turning under the ultra-violet rays. Aside from the uniform orange pallor which the showgirls imagined was natural, nothing in their routine acknowledged the day, or allowed that there were other places in the city besides all-night automats, late subways, blue-lit bars and bright swinging rooms at four o'clock in the morning.

I used to arrive in New York in the late afternoon on Saturday and find my way to the newest address I had for Sherry, for in those days she was never with the same friends or in the same apartment. Back home it took hours of cajoling my mother and the aunts before I could get away to the bus station and make the train in Bridgeport. I was told I had no business with Mary Elizabeth in New York when they didn't know where she lived, or with what kind—and Mary Elizabeth (last seen in one of those dirty little news sheets with her bum bare to the world) had no business with me. I promised myself to get to the city early to see the Metropolitan Museum or a play, or to walk in the busy streets, but they got the best of me: I was always late. I would come from the everlasting darkness of the platform in Grand Central into a radiant palace, the main waiting-room. There in an ante-chamber I would clean up

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and apply the "Raven Red" lipstick I dared not wear at home. With my mouth the color of dried blood, I sauntered down to the Oyster Bar for a bowl of chowder, a black coffee and a puff on whatever cigarette came in the fanciest package. Outside, New York was not the movieland of flashing neon, blinding marquees and bright windows I now expect; it seemed all office buildings—thick, high, menacing—blacked out for the duration. The time was right; Sherry would be getting up.

To greet me she wore a silk dressing gown of a confused oriental design—mandarin neck, kimono sleeves—and her eyes, slits puffed with sleep, were fittingly exotic. As soon as I arrived the rush to the chorus line began. There was only one uncluttered moment, time enough for one of the changing cast of characters to say, "You must be Sherry's cousin!"—not that I resembled Mary Elizabeth in any way; I looked such a kid, though I must have been nearly twenty, bumbling through the hall with a hick suitcase.

"Something to eat, Ag? A cup of coffee?" Sherry displayed her hostess smile, and I'm sure she thought there was a tasty sugar plum somewhere. She *wanted* one for me, but I knew there was only the stale metallic coffee, the bleak ice box with a quart of skimmed milk and a few forgotten apples.

"No, I've eaten."

"I tell you what—" Sherry said, inspired in the old way—"I tell you what, Mary Agnes, we'll go over to Aunt Lil's and ask for ice cream and she'll come through with enough money for the movies. . . ." "I tell you what, Mary Agnes; after we do the dishes we'll go down to the drug store and buy a *Silver Screen;* we'll work on my Ginger Rogers routine, we'll play pinochle. . . ." "I tell you what, Mary Agnes, we'll send out for sandwiches at the theater and you can have a big milkshake." So it was at all times for Sherry: life might seem a little makeshift right now—no parents, crabby aunts, hand-me-down clothes, but it was only a matter of making it through a single grey moment into the bright future. And I must say she escaped the dingy days of our childhood. If in the end things didn't turn out right it wasn't her fault. She tried; she made it; it was just that the big world was not what she imagined.

In those days when I visited Mary Elizabeth I found myself waiting on the edge of a bed while her friends threw stockings and slips from their jumbled bureaus and spidery drying racks. I remember

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trying to tuck my big feet out of the way, scrunching myself to the wall, but if I suggested waiting outside Sherry turned to me in surprise:

"You just came, Honey. When can I see you?" And the girls agreed I was no trouble at all. It was years before I sensed that they created the confusion of mismatched hose, tipped-over cologne bottles and make-up stains on the dresser—the scene lit by an infuriating fifteen-watt bulb over the mirror. To have me sitting around the house at breakfast time would have disrupted an ordinary household, but none of Sherry's friends wanted to be mistaken for ordinary Betty Boops who ate cereal in the morning. They all practiced wackiness as a religion: they worked hard and long on outlandish pompadours and upsweeps, silver eyelids and glistening talons. Then, coated with ideal artificiality, they went forth into the unsuspecting street, onto a shocked bus, into the glare of the dressing room, where they started all over again to defeat the bit of nature that *would* show through on their pretty faces. They were all simple girls—like Mary Elizabeth—with simple names. Once she shared an apartment with singing sisters from Milwaukee—Jean, Jane and Joan—I never sorted them out.

No matter how ardently Sherry tried for the bizarre effect with pitch mascara and false fingernails, she had a natural beauty which the most extreme maculations could not destroy. Her hair was red, not at all that Irish-red that brings the obvious stare, but the color of black roses, a mysterious shade that women try to imitate without success. With Sherry all was real: her hair, her height, the bones of her cheeks, the cleft in her chin—and her smile was as fresh the last time I saw her as it was the night years and years ago when her mother, old, finished at thirty, carried her up the back steps into our kitchen. My mother and Francis and I stood weighted with sleep while this child we had never laid eyes on, Mary Elizabeth Hurley in an outgrown coat, smiled at us as though we had invited her to a grand birthday party, right then, that minute.

"We'll give her some warm milk," Mary Elizabeth's mother said, "and put her to bed." But the child—almost a year older than me, almost seven—had to show us her pretty, impractical shoes with "T" straps. Her baby girl legs, without leggings, were red from the cold night air; her dress was taffeta with a sash, the sort I wore only for Sunday. Soon we were all having ginger-ale and cookies—at three o'clock in the morning.

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"Where's Jack, then?" my mother asked.

"Off. He's gone off." Mary Elizabeth's mother took off her close felt hat, and then we could see her hair, the same depth of red she had given her child, hanging in dead broken strands over her ears.

"Gone for good this time," she said. "We'll not see him again."

"You've no such luck," my mother said gently. And she was right; he did come back soon—to watch his young wife die.

He was Black Irish, handsome Jack Hurley; he sat in our front room during that awful week, sobered-up in a cloud of cigar smoke, waiting for God to be merciful—until the very last hour, after the priest had gone; then, cursing himself, he knelt by the bed, where the woman who grew beautiful again as she died put out her frail hand with great effort—to comfort him.

Mary Elizabeth told us her father could sing and play the banjo and the mandolin and slide a quarter into his cuff and make the fifty-cent piece in his hand disappear.

"Nobody will contradict that," my mother told her crossly if she was within hearing, and soon our pretty cousin understood it was best to tell me—Francis didn't believe—the marvelous stories about Jack Hurley and other imaginary princes, in secret, behind the couch or up on the attic stairs. Sometimes at Christmas Jack Hurley sent cheap jewelry which Mary Elizabeth raised from the cotton wadding with reverence—like St. Thérèse pictured on a holy card accepting the Rosary from the Virgin's hand—and she would wear the little necklace or bracelet until her neck or wrist were ringed with green and the green turned black. Then my mother scrubbed her skin raw, and tears hung on her dark lashes. One ring her father sent with a yellow stone set in golden prongs tore her face in the night, and Aunt Mae, helping my mother bathe the sores with Lysol solution, said he must have got that one out of a Cracker Jack box. Jack Hurley never remembered his daughter's birthday—none of the grown-ups did, for I suppose though they had to take her in as a child of seven they didn't want to celebrate her clouded birth. I don't know actually when or where she came to be, but Sherry told me once in New York that her parents had run off together to Providence—much in love, so happy that all those fat hens couldn't hold them. From bits I overheard I presume she was born in a charity ward to a frightened girl with another fake ring on her finger while Jack Hurley disported himself (that was the word they used) in a barroom.

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It didn't take long for the sweet sadness of her mother's death to wear off and the edginess to come back in the aunts' voices. Mary Elizabeth was another mouth to feed, another body to dress, and we heard that often enough. It didn't take long for her to learn that she was lovelier than other girls, even in faded dresses and cut-down coats, so she smiled and helped with the dishes to get ten cents for her dancing lessons or for the piano lesson with the music Sister after school. No, it never occurred to me, towering on spindle legs above the children my own age, gaping down at the top of their heads through steel-rimmed glasses (which finally uncrossed my eyes), to be affronted by her beauty.

"She has Catherine's hair," they said fondly. "She has his eyes." That was all she did have, after all: the remarkable smile, the glorious red hair, the chin dented with the shadow of her father. Later, after Sherry had used her looks to get other treats: furs and checkbooks—a free ride beyond anything her aunts could imagine—I often thought that was all she had and nothing more.

My Uncle Peter would take her on his knee, and poor Jim, Mae's silent asthmatic husband, would chase her around the table with a wheezy laugh. My father, who never could manage my long limbs, took Sherry under his arm and swung her easily, almost dropping her to the floor, then catching her; and up she flew again through the stuffy living room with giggles and shrieks of delight. They forgot for a minute where they were and made the close brown room a wild, dangerous ring for their acrobatic feats. The truth was that her uncles loved to play with her. Such feminine grace, though only in a child, recalled their own lost charm of manhood which had been nicely put aside by the scrubbing, cooking, endlessly-talking women they had married. And Sherry (Mary Elizabeth to them of course) knew instinctively how to wink at her admirers, how to toss her head of bouncing ringlets and arch her black eyebrows in surprise at every kiss.

If I make her sound like a detestable coy child, a baby movie star, I give the wrong impression. She had a talent for loving men, for giving herself freely, which she did not defile till years later, long after most women have deceived even themselves. The lonely kid throwing her arms around our Uncle Peter's neck was no different than the nervous woman in the best restaurant smiling at some man over the corpse of an extravagant fish: Sherry meant it every time.

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In eighth grade her legs suddenly grew long and sleek, and she could tap the whole length of the auditorium platform in twirls—and did for the class one afternoon—her skirt twirling up too, exposing pink garters, until the frenzied rapping of Sister Edmond called a halt. Mary Elizabeth would not dance for graduation—let Lou Magee recite the funny piece where she took off a lady going to the dentist.

"But I can sing," Mary Elizabeth said, and began "Mexicali Rose" with all her heart. Then we were transported from that damp school basement with the water running in the toilets down the hall to an unfamiliar place of yearning flesh and sad withdrawal. Hers was a thin voice, high, forced into the low lusty throbs of the blues—a poor imitation to be sure, but how did the eighth grade of St. Augustine's know, how did Sister Mary Edmond know. Sherry wailed, a woman before us, of the disasters that would come upon us soon enough; and she sang at graduation finally, bound into a white organdy dress meant for a child. She sang out for everyone else's parents: "Hark, hark the lark at Heav'ns gate sings and Phoebus 'gins arise."

In the Freshman Talent Show at high school there was no holding her back. A whole new audience of boys from all over town whistled and stamped for more after she exhausted her two dance routines. There was her shape, undeniable now, and her hair brushed back into waves blending into the red velvet curtain on the stage. She was admired in Pappadoulous' Sweet Shop all afternoon while I did the Latin homework for us both on the dining-room table. If I envied her, it was only for a moment, when one of the perfect boys in saddle shoes and a pork-pie hat came and broke the terrible dullness of our house with lively shuffling and patronizing good-will until the queen made her entrance. And she was, without seeking the title, the queen of Central High, gracious in the corridors, stately in class, a presence in the girls' lunchroom—never with unseemly pride, but with the inherent simplicity of royalty in her plain clothes.

"Come along, Ag," she would say on a sunny afternoon when a carload of boys waited in front of our house, and she would lure some poor sap who wanted to gaze at her into asking me. I was vulnerable on different grounds then, and couldn't stand the contempt in their eyes, the gagging politeness in their mouths, so I preferred to stay at home with my library books. Later on, when

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Sherry wanted me to come to New York, it didn't matter: I had accepted myself, an ugly cousin, my sharp nose pressed against the sweet-shop window.

There are many girls who come to flower at the silly age of fifteen or sixteen and hold their loveliness like perishable blooms. I am shocked to meet them in the stores downtown and discover them wilted at twenty, bodies already turning to hard pods, closed to possibility and change. It might have happened to my cousin if she had fallen in love with one of her high-school beaux; but she never really had a chance even for that deadening solution; she was too spectacular for our factory town.

I can't come up with the answer to Mary Elizabeth, any more than *she* could, though a Park Avenue psychiatrist furnished her with long plausible stories to tell. There was the rootlessness of Jack Hurley in her that wanted nothing to do with two-family houses and supper at six o'clock; and like her father she was always performing just a little—her walk, her smile, the inventions that brightened the evenings when we sat together at algebra and French. Being no one at home but an orphan with a name that was bad cess and a burden to my mother who was looking for crosses to bear, Mary Elizabeth hoped in her adolescent fantasy to be someone even grander than Aunt Lil, who had married a lawyer, to dwell in a land more magical than the one green hill across the river where rich people lived. For years, while I learned to accept a hall-bedroom and the lonely oblong of my face, I told that incredible person in the mirror, substance of myself, that it was her beauty that set her free. Such nonsense: that perfection of form trapped her; she became a rare animal, a spirit caged within her own body.

Mr. Garafano, the used-car dealer, gave us a ride home after Glee Club one day in a Packard convertible the color of heavy cream with caramel leather seats. It was spring and anyone could see us, including my mother on her way to the second-day bread store. We thought it odd that Mr. Garafano complimented Mary Elizabeth (he called her "Red") on her height when I was three inches taller, and though she never took a ride again he was not discouraged: when we came around his corner on the way to school Mr. Garafano lingered at the front of his lot. He was fat and forty and smelled of cigars—a big laugh—quite a different matter from the young druggist, Mr. Shea, who began to pay for our sodas and

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give Mary Elizabeth perfume samples. He was handsome in a lanky way and kidded around with us about boys, but when summer came he spent an indecent amount of time watching out the window to see Mary Elizabeth come down the street, and he ran out and wound the awnings up and down, talking to her about serious matters: movies, dancing, love, her family, his family. When he came to the boiling point Tom Shea would ask her to come into the cool dark store where fans blew the air and the smooth marble counter took the heat out of your hands. He would fix her a cherry Coke. Such innocence is touching, but she was still a little girl and he was a man, I suppose, so one Saturday night in August we all woke up to the noise of glass breaking and found that young Shea had dropped his bottle on our front walk. My father helped him out of the barberry, and with lovesick eyes going all over Mary Elizabeth's pajamas, Tom said, "I must have lost my way."

That fall when she would have been a cheerleader and the Princess of Transylvania in *Sweethearts,* Aunt Lil came up with the money to send Mary Elizabeth away to the Sisters of Mercy. There she played field hockey and girl's basketball and went through a religious period (with the same fervor she called forth for her analysis). It was novel for Sherry to be holy and calm, to conjure emotions from the depths of an inexperienced heart—to exist on guilt, self-abnegation, humility. The demands of the role were great; I'm glad I missed the performance. She came home at Christmas ten pounds lighter from the spiritual indulgence, more shapely than ever; she paraded all the way up the center aisle to communion in her blue serge uniform, a small black mantilla draped over her head—more enchanting than any bride in white. All our bells rang—the phone and the front door—but Mary Elizabeth turned her suitors away with a saintly sigh and the secret smile of one who has the higher calling. Then, invited to the golf club across the river she went out on New Year's Eve and danced till morning. I was waiting in the hall for her, listening for the sound of a car, but she came walking up our hill alone, and when I let her in she ran down the hall to the bathroom.

"Come in, Ag," she whispered. Under the borrowed evening wrap her dress was torn; a gardenia, crushed and brown, hung from the tattered ruffle. We spent an hour washing the mud spots out of the skirt, but the dress was ruined.

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"Silly old fool!" Mary Elizabeth wailed, despairing over the limp net, "Silly old fool!"

I didn't know what to ask. "How was the party?"

"Dreamy. A big band—I got to sing two numbers in front of a real mike, and the leader said any time he needed a girl. . . . Oh, that silly old fool," she cried again, finding another rip where her heel had caught the underskirt.

"Who?"

"Dr. Morrisey." (She had gone to the golf club with young Jim Morrisey: I had watched from a dark corner in the hall when he came to the door with a corsage.)

"Well, Jimmy put rye in his ginger-ale to prove he's a man. He passed out, and his father gave me a ride home."

"How awful!" I said, not having the slightest idea what could have happened. "Are you all right?"

"Oh, sure." Mary Elizabeth laughed. "He didn't mean anything." Then she sat down on the side of the bathtub. "Oh, Ag," her voice was young and bewildered, "why does it always have to be me?" The question seemed easy enough to answer.

Back at school, she taught the can-can to the Senior Sodality, smoked in the cellar, and got herself dismissed before Easter. Aunt Lil, whose colored girl had left to have a baby, took her in for the housework and didn't allow Mary Elizabeth out of the yard. In May my father went to bed one night and never woke up. My mind was so full of him laid out in Conley's funeral parlor that I never noticed how my brother Francis was making himself useful in Aunt Lil's garden.

Francis used to wait for me after school and we'd go visit Mary Elizabeth in her respectable prison. I sat on the slate-stone porch, which was one of the features of Lil's house and which she had learned to call a terrace. The only time Lil gave us a thought, when she was home at all and not out playing bridge, was when she stuck her head out the sun-parlor door and said, "Don't sit on the cold stone, Agnes, you'll catch cold in your bowels."

No doubt there were buds on the rambler roses—held within delicate tendrils until their time came—and surely the apple tree snowed down on us, promising so much more than the stunted wormy fruit it bore each fall, but I saw only the throbbing heart of red carnations (chosen because they hold up so well) trailing the golden motto "Beloved Husband" into the magnificent box in

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which Mr. Conley set my father stiffly to rest. In the murky funeral home, which seemed to me a vestibule of fitting horror for the grave, clots of flowers blocked my vision: gladiolas and snapdragons wired and puttied into wreaths, sweetheart roses in a baby cross—"Our Dear Father"—and bouquets big enough to open a bank. Tributes to the florist's art appeared on every page of my Gallic Wars. I wore a black skirt, and the sight of this might bring to mind, between the successive *gaucherie*s of M. and Mme. Perichon on their imbecilic voyage, other arrangements for death: the hasty purchase of our mourning, the warehouse of caskets down in New Haven: a dazzling display of varnished boxes lined with velvets and silks in pale colors to compliment the morbid tones of the embalmer's palette. Then I saw again the dresses, rose and pale green like the slabs I sat on, dresses banked by the rentable palms, dresses of lace and crepe, unwearable garments of no size, slit all the way down the back to "fit" a woman wasted or bloated in death.

In my aunt's yard the sun was bright and warm. Along each side was a strip of garden neglected since the old Yankee school-teacher had sold the house to my Uncle Peter, though the tulip and daffodil bulbs still yielded up a few weak blossoms, and forgotten plants pushed up out of habit through years of dry stalks and a blanket of leaves. No one in our family had any use for gardening: they had heard enough of poor potato crops and pitiful Mayo squashes to ever want to kneel to the earth again. Indeed I heard Lil tell a neighbor that her family had been "in agriculture," as though my grandfather was a gentleman farmer, breeding fancy apples or prize cows. Childless bustling woman that she was, Aunt Lil had developed a sharp eye for clutter of any kind, and I suppose that looking out beyond the sterile tidiness of her kitchen one day she saw her back yard and thought Francis might clean it up.

Neither my brother nor Mary Elizabeth had the slightest notion of what they were about when they went out together in that spring sunshine. One of them would rake as the other hacked at the rubble, and then they would sit together on the grass and talk till supper time. It was a slow business, clearing away the brittle stems and matted leaves, and Francis carried off the debris in a peach basket and dumped it to rot behind the garage. They scratched at the ground with metal claws, uprooting what they thought were weeds, until they drew an ugly rim of black soil around the grass and only the obvious flowers were left—naked and humiliated. Aunt Lil

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was pleased, for now the yard looked like one of her pantry shelves, stark and irreproachable before the world—and she believed that the world saw and cared about the state of shelves and closets and fingernails.

What's worth telling?

When they asked me, "What were you up to, Miss, that you couldn't see?" I didn't have an answer—then. There was nothing to see: on my lap a geometry book, black perimeters defining truths within range of a sophomore—each day a new proposition, another proof. The yard, inscribed around us in a black line of earth, holds the three of us, Francis and Mary Elizabeth and me, forever, the last of our childhood dumped behind the garage. We are circumscribed by one another and by the knowledge of what would become of us as sure as my father is by his damp-proof box.

"What kind of fool were you then?"—The same kind I am now. They dug in the ground; they sat on the grass. Sometimes, not often, they came to be with me on the stone porch.

Francis wore his mourning tie still and looked a likely candidate for the seminary. My mother had always wanted it for him and claimed on occasion that she had heard his call (an unnatural voice whispering from the rectory). My brother was handsome and about to graduate from high school with his clubs and teams set down next to his picture in the yearbook: History, Junior Service, French, Thespians, Glee Club, Swimming, Basketball, Cross Country—and Class Secretary. It's a wonder Francis turned into such a dull man—but maybe the tribute under his name summed him up too well: he was voted "Most Affable." Active and happy—taking showers, training his hair, studying, serving Mass—too important to mope with me and Mary Elizabeth in our projections of black lucite and smoked mirrors, marabou and Leslie Howard. It kept him busy the whole time to be the most affable Francis X. Keely.

What *did* I think then when he didn't go to graduation practice and missed the Senior Prom? Why, that his life, like mine, had stopped on the edge of our father's grave. And "that one," as my mother called Mary Elizabeth forever after, as if her name would bring the Devil back to live among us, "that one" shuffled off to Buffalo on the porch, her breasts bouncing, her red hair beating her back in a rhythm of life. She costumed herself in an old cotton

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dress of Aunt Lil's which she drew tight at the waist with a belt—pathetic, a ravaged heroine of post-war *Realismo* breathing desperation and desire. Well the hell with that: this was still the Depression for us and I was fifteen years old. The hell with that and other afterthoughts.

I drooped my head down between my high shoulders and sucked sadness from the air. We were studying *Hamlet* in English. It's hard to imagine a more personal reading of the play than mine.

" 'Tis not alone this inky cloak, good mother. . . ." I stalked the misty cemetery where the sod was not yet settled over my father, and appeared in a nurse's cape behind Conley's blessed candles (which were not lit until we arrived at the funeral "home"). I swept away the sickening floral arrangements—"What?" I said with a cynical laugh, "these for a man to whom you gave not the tribute of one flower while he lived." Or, switching roles, I tripped, maddened, down the altar steps in a dance modeled on Mary Elizabeth's Fred Astaire number and confronted my mother and aunts in their black hats with fennel and rue tied in packets like the sachets they gave each other on birthdays. "Hey non, nonny," I sang, for I could see this much: that they were bitter women with empty complaints who at last had gained a terrible dignity in their widow's weeds and their ceremonious weeping; their fragile minds shattered, they moaned lunatic sentiments: "He went peaceful," "A beautiful death," "Never a word," "It's those behind who suffer"—and by the time it was over they came to believe that my father was a sneaky fellow who slipped off without warning.

One Friday night the mad world became real, and like other tragic figures I was left alone: my father, my brother, my cousin Sherry, all the people I loved, had been taken from me—in the normal course of affairs, I might say, because death, shame, a boy going off to college seem like childhood diseases compared to the larger plague. It was coming to the summer of 1939. There was nothing left but report cards and the pomp of Francis' graduation ceremony—nothing but the joyless procession of hot days and wasted hours. Summer idleness had settled upon us already, and with the garden work finished we three sat on the porch every afternoon, our only project to get ten cents out of Aunt Lil for the Good Humor man. We might have been inmates of a hospital set

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out to get some warmth in our bones, so it was difficult to tell them why God gave me eyes.

"There's a lot went on under your nose, young lady. You just better come down to earth, Ag."

It had been a Friday; perhaps I know that only because Lil still tells the story: "It was a Friday night," she says. "I remember Mary Elizabeth wouldn't eat the haddock. Nice filets I got to poach in milk, but she never would eat half the perfectly good food we put in front of her. . . . I did everything for that girl."

It seems Mary Elizabeth got up in the middle of the meal to make it to the movies; I know it was one of the first times she was let out of the house. I went down to church with my mother that night to pay for the Month's Mind Mass for my father—so Francis went to Poli's with Mary Elizabeth, and on Saturday morning "the whole thing was clear." I've always wondered at that phrase, because to me there's never been anything about it that wasn't muddy. Aunt Lil got up to take a seltzer because the coconut pie was a little heavy, and hearing a noise like breathing below, she went downstairs to find them "at it" on her couch. "The blouse open," she says. "I thought it was an animal, and I told her, you are no better than a *low* creature. . . ." And the story goes on—Francis seduced while carrying incense up the center aisle, Sherry doing a belly dance on her mother's deathbed while Jack Hurley strums the ukulele at the foot of the Cross.

On Sunday Sherry was gone, with the mayonnaise jar full of pennies off the pantry shelf and all the money she could filch from Lil's purse. She was sixteen and they never tried to find her, never saw her again except in the newspapers, smiling over her shoulder with her rump bared. We stood in the bus station together, knocking our shins into the suitcase Lil had bought for her to go to the nuns.

"Oh Boy," she said, "I'm finally getting out of this rotten town."

"It wasn't your fault."

"Sure it was," Mary Elizabeth said looking down at her flesh as though it were separate from her, the embodiment of an impossible child. "For weeks I told old Francis to chase his tail; but it's always my fault."

I handed over her winter coat, wet from the heat of my arm, and at least five men rushed up to help with her suitcase. When

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she turned on the step of the bus to wave goodbye her gesture was big; her smile dramatized the moment: she was already on stage and she hadn't even left home. In her high-heeled shoes, bright with Shinola, and with a brave Carmen mouth, she was gone from us. The crowd of strange men who looked up at her seemed a chorus of male dancers, ready to follow her with whatever grace they could muster into the stinking hot recesses of the Bridgeport Bus.

The summer heat settled into the rooms of our downstairs flat, never to leave; even during thunder storms when the air blew the curtains, it never got inside to us. Days moved slowly—Francis went off to mow lawns in Lil's neighborhood and I read stacks of library books with sticky red and green covers: mysteries and novels and everything of Eugene O'Neill that was in print—and behind each uneventful day was the figure of my mother, a mound of lard melting on the kitchen stool, fingering the bankbooks until their pages were transparent with grease, tucking them in and out of their snug envelopes with a trembling that tensed us all. Where was the money to come from? It was certainly unfortunate (by this she meant unfair) of my father—Lord have mercy on him—to die when Francis was ready to go to college.

"May he rest in peace," she said with an unforgiving edge to her voice that echoed across town towards St. Michael's cemetery. May he rest in peace while she goes begging to her sisters.

Nights I lay on my bed and wondered where Mary Elizabeth was now that she wasn't sharing my room, now that I no longer listened for her admirers coming up the hill on hot nights: the shy smitten druggist, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker ensnared with passion in the barberry.

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. . . . Count your buttons, Aggie." I could hear the promise in her voice, as if she was sitting on the other bed brushing out her hair, sparks crackling in the dark—my nightdress *tied* at the neck; I didn't have a button to my name.

Where is she now? Where is all that spring sadness I felt in Aunt Lil's garden? Faded at the end of summer, burnt out, like my father, like the patch of grass in our yard. By now Lil's penny jar was empty; where would the money come from? There was never any real doubt that Francis would go off to Fordham in the fall, and it seems now that other events didn't surprise us. We

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stopped only for a moment (as the aunts did when that girl ran off) to cluck at the war—not at the enemy—and went on with the bedlam of our lives: years that went by like the pages of a calendar flipping by on Poli's screen to the swelling strains of "Tipperary."

But the days were long. "Another day, another dollar," my mother said jauntily—she thought it was a happy phrase—and hustled me off each morning—not to school, for I was sixteen and could be put on as extra help in the zipper factory, where I sat sorting government orders stamped RUSH. I had to finish paying for our happy home. I had to pay for Francis to study 16th century logic and rhetoric with the Jesuits. I thought of Mary Elizabeth, and stole a fifty-cent piece out of my pay envelope each week and put it in a candy box, which was hers. Francis walked among the righteous. He found himself in the NROTC and at a desk and on a ship and with a war. He was thrown against a gangway. Mamma pin a rose on me.

Something was going to happen. I felt that for a couple of years, saw the expectancy somewhere between my beak-bird nose and the slope-off of my chin—in my mouth to be exact. I thought there might be words that mattered, like the song of a Chinese maiden perhaps, stark and elliptic, or the street cry of a French whore, *symbolique* and endearing in its shrillness, but my tongue went dry, my lips cracked, and when the words came they were cheap sarcastic replies to my mother, invective without wit, without meter, without imagery. Nothing was going to happen. I had nothing to say.

At home the months went by. We were two fish in a bowl, my mother and I, drowsing in mid-water, chasing specks, suspended in liquid slime, darting at each other in pecking motions, sustaining ourselves automatically in the staleness with some low-grade will to go on for no reason. Francis wrote in navy lingo from the Good Ship Lollipop about a matey life on board a secret ocean. My mother prayed for him—a jumbledy gurgling:

"Lite uv adjuz prayfruz, lilisuv fiel prayfruz, Virgin mose pur prayfruz—prayfruz who have recoursa Thee." She started, never to end, a series of novenas, fretted about ration books and got slipped an occasional bag of sugar by a Democratic committeeman who had always been sure of the Keelys' vote. In the zipper factory I sorted, stapled, filed, then was put to typing routine letters for the president—Dear Major Spoolfiddle: Your contract (USQMC/

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100257z/42m) for 150,000 total-slide khaki tapes, as acknowledged in our letter of March 14th, etc. . . . I pasted defense stamps in books with the Minute Man on the cover, wore a snood and flappy slacks, carried spam sandwiches in a black tin box, grew nearly six feet tall, and earned a First Aid certificate by wheezing the air out of my co-workers (drowning victims), bandaging their head wounds, and cutting off their flow of blood. I ran around our block in an air-raid helmet carrying a blank piece of paper from Mr. Dunn to Mike Ford in three minutes. History made up the meaningless games I would have learned to play in any case.

It took a while to figure out: a postcard with a fat lady in bloomers running out of a Chick-Sales. A printed caption, *Let's get to the bottom of this, cutie!,* and written on the other side: "Will be in New London with USO Sunday, Love, Sherry." Among other things I learned that day was the story of Mary Elizabeth's new name. A flamenco dancer claimed that in a spotlight her hair was the color of aged sherry—blood of his native land—and so he had named her that, Sherry, during a two-week run at a Newark nightclub. She never used her real name again. In a few years when she blithely ordered Tio Pepe at the best bars in New York, Sherry said, "He was a Frenchman—you know, *haute monde* with a title—and he insisted upon 'Chérie.'" Then she repeated something which had been said to her: "Well, it became Sherry—corrupted like everything else, I guess." But in the full sun of an April afternoon with the Thames River dazzling and the air full of music and the roaring whistling sailors, the name Sherry Henderson seemed as natural to her as Mary Agnes Keely was to me.

"How did you manage it, Ag?" she asked. "I never thought you'd be able to get away from them."

"I told them I was doing a Sunday shift at the plant."

"That's the ticket!" She sounded as if we were still in league and had escaped from the house for an afternoon show. As nearly as I can remember she never mentioned any of the family again, and when I spoke of my mother, of Francis, of Aunt Mae or Uncle Peter—as I had to since there was no one else to make up my scenes—she listened with little comment. From that day on I might have been any friend she had shared a room with in one of those many apartments. I might as well have brought her up to date on the ailments of a family she had never seen.

We sat on the grass under the criss-cross of 2 × 4's supporting

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the temporary stage at the submarine base in New London. There was bunting with stars and stripes tacked up around us, and the sun shone through the gaps. Near us three little dogs, two poodles and a mutt, strutted and yapped through a rehearsal of their act—sitting up, praying, playing dead and jumping through imaginary hoops—and for a minute it looked like the Hawaiian girls in hula skirts with long tangles of hair and paper hibiscus blossoms were going to outnumber the rhumba dancers in wedgies and fruited turbans; but then another cluster of banana heads and ruffled breasts scurried out of the barracks across the way and there were more rhumbas than hulas. We talked about the places she had been: Pensacola, Fort Benning, Camp Kilmer. You were always singing and dancing—you never knew whether there'd be a stage and a mike or whether you'd have to sing off the back of a truck.

"Gee!" I said, fascinated by the dots of flaming rouge at the inner corner of her eyes, the streaks of white grease on her eyelids, her cherry lips coated with oil, and the pink shading on the lobes of her ears. White birds fluttered in a cage, white rabbits nibbled the air, impatient for false bottoms and secret pockets—all of this, though magic to Sherry too, was yet natural. And so I felt that Sunday, with the band booming, the M.C. warming up the boys with jokes about their officers, the grey warships lolling like harmless zoo mammals, that she danced through strangeness as most of us stumble through houses we know, accepting an irrational arrangement of doors and hallways, getting on with the business of the day. The notion persisted in my head for years that she was at home in the marvels of her world; but of course there are mornings when you can't find your way down the hall to the bathroom, when passages are sealed: then midgets and amplifiers, klieg lights and diamonds in the navel are freakish distortions in a macabre scene —gothic, unmanageable, disordered.

A heavy-set man with talcum powder on his beard and a rose in the buttonhole of his uniform came over to Sherry when he had nothing else on his mind.

"How's it going, Kid?"

"Pretty good, Stu."

He wandered off in the direction of his comic cigar, and came upon us again through a slit in the bunting.

"How's it going, Kid?"

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"Just fine, Stu," Sherry said with a smile. "This heat is murder on the make-up."

"Powder it down again, Kid, before you go on." Stu took her head in his manicured hands, examined her mouth and eyes with professional interest. He flicked a swarm of gnats away with a green silk handkerchief.

"A coming talent," he said. "Remarkable girl."

At last Sherry explained, rather defensively I thought, "This is my cousin."

"Is that so?" He bit the tip of a new cigar, moistened it with a sucking of his lips and tongue and went off to see about the line of hulas filing up the steps to the whooping of sailors and the twanging undulation of guitars. The dog trainer threw bits of biscuit in the air and the poodles leapt high—one, then another, in perfect time with the little mutt in a paper ruff and clown hat popping up on the fifth beat and tumbling down in a sorry heap.

"Stu's the manager of our outfit," Sherry said. In a moment he came back.

"You've got five minutes, Baby." We stood up and shook our skirts, and I looked at my shoe while Stu fastened the hooks at the back of Sherry's dress. Then—unbelievable to me—he ran his fingers up her legs, straightening the seams of her stockings— soft fingers with clear nail polish and a chunky onyx ring.

"Don't give them any more than two numbers," he said, "I want to be in the busses by seven o'clock."

"Shiny face—I know, Honey." Sherry twisted her mouth in a grimace that recalled her answers to the nuns.

Stu—foppish, middle-aged, blatantly handling the beautiful girl—was the first of many agents, managers, patrons: Mert, Sol, Jerry, Tonkey, the Colonel. I came to take them pretty much for granted, and towards the end I always expected some stocky gent to show up when I visited Sherry in New York. The man would enter her apartment, or be in his place already, a scotch and soda in hand, wearing a blue cashmere suit, white-on-white shirt, initialled silk tie, cuff links, ring, cologne—all the appurtenances of control. Like all the rest of them, Stu took particular notice of her clothes, her hair, her figure. Like no other breed of men they were concerned with fabrics and style, and I even got used to chatting with Sol about the length of her skirts and agreeing with the Colo-

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nel that she should avoid anything but dramatic hats.

"A simple cotton is all Sherry needs," said Stu, "nothing fancy, a little sweetheart neck like the girl back home. That's what the boys want, see—" He spit cigar juice.

" . . . the girl back home!"

I took a seat out front, on the end of a bench next to a sailor with a long face the color of oatmeal and tried to imagine his girl back home. Sherry, smiling big enough for all the boys in the world, sang "Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me. . . ," and it didn't matter that the lyrics were supposedly sung by a man—on the battlefield, say, or in the bowels of a submarine —all that existed was the sea of male voices cheering, rising in waves to her. Sherry spread her arms wide to welcome them all—oatmeal face, baby lieutenant and weathered old commander. It didn't matter to the USO that her voice was thin, untrained and rasped on the high notes as she sang the third number.

"Stu will give me hell," she said, afterwards, blotting her tears, "but I can't help it . . . they were all so darling to me. See, Ag, here's the picture I send them for a pin-up." Mary Elizabeth in another simple cotton blown up over the knees, on a swing all twined with blossoms—apple blossoms, back yards, girl's hair massed on shoulders, fuzzed sunlight—the pay-off.

"Well, Sherry," I said, "Sherry!"

I left her at the door of a grey barracks. A man's voice called, and she hurried up the steps into her wonderland of yapping dogs, sweat, cold cream, rabbit pellets, and Stu with a bottle of Kentucky Moon come to the door to find her.

Mert said, "I see her as the exotic type, black jersey and an upsweep."

"How's that. . . ?" I hadn't been listening. We were standing outside the theater waiting for Sherry and some of her friends to come out after a performance of *Oklahoma*. The crowd was more interesting than Mert, her agent, whom I'd been telling yes, oh fine, all evening.

"Sherry should come to the theater in a cab."

"Yes."

". . . get a press agent."

"Oh fine."

"Shouldn't waste her time on some two-bit band player."

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"Yes." Sherry could do worse than show up at the clubs around town with a certain star, all to be arranged by him, Mert.

"Oh fine."

"I see it this way," Mert said. "Columbia Pictures may take an interest in the girl, but I happen to know they're loaded with All-American kids . . . besides, she could get typed, bad idea at this stage in her career. As I see it, *Oklahoma* is a springboard, but she's no comic, see—a natural yes, but what she needs is to show a versatility—an exotic quality for the switch: black jersey halter, furs, upsweep."

"Fine," I said. "Fine."

"This Columbia Pictures deal could be very big." Sherry came out in a raincoat and saddle shoes, her cheeks scrubbed, her hair held back by an elastic band. This started Mert again: "If you want to stay in the chorus the rest of your life that's all right with me too, you know. I could very easily arrange for you to make the columns next week, but I mean if you go around looking like Miss Nobody. . . ."

"Jesus, I'm only going back to my place with the kids."

Mert pointed out the whole disaster with one finger brutally jabbed into my shoulder.

"That's just it, that's just the angle with this baby. She thinks she's working in Kresge's—going to have a few beers with the girls." He turned, hacked in the gutter, and one sweet act suggested another:

"Thumb your nose at Columbia Pictures, Sweetheart—it's no skin off my back."

"This is my cousin," Sherry said with exaggerated patience, "we are going to have a little fun."

"A lousy sax player," he growled.

Sherry looked fierce, as though she might strike the swaggering little man.

"Some two-bit sax player," Mert heckled, and scurried off towards war-dim Times Square: clickety click click clickety—that one wore taps on his shoes.

Some two-bit sax player was Tony De Angelo, the big handsome product of an Italian father and an Irish mother out on Staten Island—though I'm not sure how Sherry ever found this out, because more than any of her show-biz friends Tony created the impression of having always lived in mid-town Manhattan. For him

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there was no harking back, no hatred for a crowded house with oilcloth on the table and cooking smells in your clothes. He existed now, only now, at the moment he stood before you: tall, jazzy, self-absorbed, product of the whole yearning American psyche with its Jack Armstrong heart cut out.

During the run of *Oklahoma* Sherry lived at some good addresses, old places on the West Side with doormen and mahogany elevators; and Tony always had his key. As I talked to her at three in the morning her eyes seldom left the door. Tony would be coming in half an hour—in ten minutes, in five seconds.

"Well, you know how it is with late subways if you miss one, kid. . . . Don't crump on me now, Ag"; Sherry would brighten with her stage smile. "Tony's going to be here in a minute."

So I nursed another can of beer until it was warm from my hands and flat. The girls in the show came in and gossipped for a while, timing themselves under the sun lamp. They assumed that Sherry was waiting for Tony, like a housewife with dinner on the stove. They thought it was kind of cute, and I remember one storybook blonde who was inspired to write long letters to her guy in the Marines on pages and pages of blue stationery while we waited for Tony.

"So tell me," Sherry said, and I talked. Her face was full of anxious devotion, the injured beauty of her mother, and she blinked at the closed door through which he would come.

"So tell me," she said.

I told her all the goddamn nonsense on my mind, speaking to the four walls in a drowsy monologue. I wondered if I could absent myself from the nausea of daily life, from the factory with its everrunning day—put a net on my mind so it wouldn't get caught in the gears. Then I wouldn't have to address myself to the cafeteria slop or the Red Cross collection or the damn figures on the time sheet. They could be made natural functions of the body, and I would have control over all that was stupid and necessary.

"Why, Ag, I thought you liked your job."

"I am giving myself to eight hours a day at a zipper factory, and if you count the overtime there's nothing left but supper and a bath."

"Look, Honey, this show's been running for nearly a year, and all I know is I get on that stage every night and put out."

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"But then," I said, "safety guards presume you have two arms and all your fingers to begin with. . . ."

"Ag, do you think Tony'll want coffee when he comes in?"

Those nights waiting for Tony became my favorite times. I recall them as triumphant, and if Sherry didn't understand, Jean and Jane and Dolly and Peg never got it at all: they had learned to sit and smile at oddities, and I was just another mad thing, like the bum who picked theater programs out of the gutter every night on 45th Street, the fat lady in the delicatessen who had been Miss Binghamton of 1932, and the men who spoke the jibberish of army maneuvers or Wall Street while they waited to be taken off and fondled in a taxi. I was Sherry's skinny high-toothed "little cousin" (tall as a man). Three or four times a year I made it to New York at dusk, ate my chowder at Grand Central, stood through the whole of *Oklahoma* with its bright days and blue love-song nights: good snared by evil with "adult" touches.

"Suppose a man," (I didn't mention Francis) "were to follow the expected road without any hitches, become nothing more nothing less than his training and his character dictated . . . it'd be like the life of a larva moth."

Sherry was on the floor, going through her dance exercises, stretching towards the door.

"He could be a very nice guy."

"But of course," I said, "I only talk like this while we're waiting for Tony."

"He's working a small club downtown." She arched her back, her arms working overhead in a graceful plucking—"and that's why Tony's late." She was Mary Elizabeth justifying some shamefully cheap trinket Jack Hurley sent to our house with the postage half paid.

Tony De Angelo was worth waiting for, I suppose—and then again he wasn't worth the tip of her little finger. He let himself into the apartment whenever he pleased, and usually stopped to light a cigarette or run a comb through his hair before he gave her so much as an insolent smile. He stood before us for a moment to be admired, which wasn't hard for me after months of dough-faces at the factory. He was grand and big and stuck in your eye. Sherry feasted: his thick black hair grew in waves close to his head, except for a forelock which flopped boyishly. His face was heavy, square at the temples, square at the chin, with a frankly Italian

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nose, almost Roman but ever so slightly askew—busted once, a miracle considering how often Tony enraged people. His eyes —I don't think they were brown or black, but a dark color of his own—private, skimming over the objects before him (people were objects to Tony) as though nothing commanded his attention. At last he settled on Sherry, and his gaze was a benediction. There was damn little that Tony could appreciate without a sneer, but Sherry was on the list with the world's greatest trumpet player, Harry James, the big radio networks, and custom-made suits.

"Tony has bedroom eyes," a model said one night—but that was wishful thinking. He looked through your clothes all right, but it wasn't your body that interested him, it was whatever crippled thing hid inside: the nasal Brooklyn accent of an actress trying to sound like Katherine Cornell, the parrot mind of a script writer, the fear in a tough Master Sergeant. I was not a member of their beautiful-bodies club and when Tony De Angelo looked at me I like to think I puzzled him. There was no deception in my hungry adolescent form: I was the cynical clown, the sensitive spinster, the hell-of-a-good kid.

"Mary Agnes, how's the girl?"—His words sounded like a joke, and I can imagine him thinking:

"You have no secrets, do you, Sweetheart? You plan to make that a way of life."

If Sherry made coffee Tony would say, "Not right now. I'll have that Canadian Club." And when she poured him the best liquor she could buy, he flicked it away.

"What have you got in the house? Fruit? Maybe I'll have some scrambled eggs to start."

Then she watched him eat, and asked (as if the management had sent her), "Is everything o.k.?"

"Great," Tony said, but in some small way—his finger tapping on the burnt edge of toast, his fork held to let the egg dribble through the tines—he let her know how hopeless she was as the Little Woman.

I never set eyes on Tony De Angelo before three o'clock in the morning, and he was always perfectly dressed, often in a tuxedo with wide glossy lapels, so if he hadn't come in with his bulbous sax case he might have been arriving from one of those prewar parties I had seen in the movies, with frozen-faced extras fox-

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trotting around the pillars. I was to understand, and so were the kids who lived with Sherry—she told us with misty eyes—that Tony "could not fight for his country." They wouldn't even have him in the U.S. Marine Corps band. There was something damaged (a vague internal organ which she described on different occasions as the kidney, the liver, the pancreas)—just something that made him unfit.

It was true: there were many sad stories during the war, but when I think of it now I can't imagine that Tony De Angelo would have been any less bitter if he had sweated out his days in glory on a Pacific island. Sherry and her friends had big enough hearts to accept his tragedy, and so that covered the situation nicely. Injustice for Tony was so much bigger than a lousy medical fact—it was the whole deal that brought him into the world in a four-family house on Staten Island, that gave him a musical facility but no original talent, that made him expect because he was one gorgeous kid he could have something besides hard luck—and by the time Sherry met him he was not even angry, just using one set-up after another for whatever it was worth: a drink, a few dollars, a woman.

Maybe his style was unfamiliar then: we were involved in a spiritual renaissance, and we hoped, we cared, while Tony, convinced of personal destruction, played his own game. He was a prophet: youth turned silent, moody and selfish—sick because it knows that nobody wins. What mattered to Tony was lonely nervous grace—his night-time body beating to the rhythm of the band, shut off from the dancers, finding its momentary salvation in a note that came off—as good as sex. Once at the Palladium I saw him in his ecstasy—but only once, because Sherry did not like to watch him play. If Tony were around now, exactly as he was twenty years ago, he would be a cliché—but then, ah then, he was a remarkable bastard.

"A terrible bastard," Little Dot said in her lady-like drawl, " . . . and Sherry could have a lead in the road show, but she's sitting around for him . . . it's one handout after another." Little Dot was wiry and resilient, the only one of Sherry's friends who ever made a name for herself. She had worked hard training a sweet lyric soprano voice for years, and when her first big chance came on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour she lost to a quadruple

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amputee who played (with his teeth) "God Bless America" on nails stuck into a cigarette carton.

"You wouldn't catch me jumpin' through a hoop for that bastard."

Little Dot went right on with her scales. I took up going to night school to learn whatever useless pleasantries existed in poems and stories—to learn something apart from the zippers which evolved each year like a Darwinian species: grew longer, smarter, more durable, only to be killed off by superior models with better teeth, more adaptable bindings. My mother, praying for Francis, who was in Washington and later got that piece of gangway in the thigh, was inspired to return to the arts. She created a cake made without butter or sugar and only one egg. It stuck like paste on the teeth. She made a display of weeny figures for her Civil Defense class with peanut shells for bodies and pipe cleaners for limbs, and set them in cigar boxes: peanuts straddled peanuts, performing (one hoped) artificial respiration; healthy peanuts carried sick peanuts on a snip of old blanket; there were peanuts in tourniquets and arm slings, peanuts with concussions and complex fractures, and one old peanut (modeled after the bedridden ancient of our block) being evacuated in an Indian handclasp seat by two sturdy peanut wardens to the cellar of the Congregational Church. Sherry continued her chorus-girl role in *Oklahoma.*

Sherry Henderson's career was a child's dream—that was the maimed thing Tony De Angelo saw. There were at least three screen tests maneuvered for her by a bull-neck named Jerry, and she was content to come back from the Coast and pretend she was interested in her future; but she would have chucked the whole business in one minute if Tony had agreed to teach music and dance with her—which was, of course, Sherry's idea. We were hiding the liquor in the bottom of a closet, because of his kidney or liver or pancreas, and I was delivering a facetious sermon to myself on the advantage of developing my given peculiarities—no chest, long nose, sunken eyes—into full-fledged eccentricities.

"Do something with what God gives you," I said, "for his mercy is unbounded. We have only to look around us to discover there is a Great Intelligence behind the intricate patterns of the Universe, and it is our duty to discover further the purpose for which the Good Lord put us here. . . , for He moves in strange and mysterious ways."

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"Put that pint in the shoe box, Ag."

"It is our duty to discover ourselves as part of the Divine System, for surely with this body I am meant to carry a burden on my back, and these eyes must see deep into the machinery of souls—yes, even into my own faltering soul; and the nose . . . the nose must smell out corruption and decay. . . ."

"Oh, stop it," Sherry cried. Her hair was all crazy from stooping in the closet. "You're always laughing lately, never serious for a moment. We do what we must. We do what we can. I could give tap lessons, you know, and teach ballroom dancing. Tony could teach the sax and probably the accordion if he would only settle down."

"You must be kidding," I said.

"Yes." Big tears washed the mascara down her cheeks. This was wilder than any of the mad schemes for fame and fortune she ever had back home. She actually conceived of rented rooms up over a drugstore in some sizeable outpost, "The De Angelo's" painted on the window and rows of kiddy legs wriggling around on highly polished floors—"With my foot I tap, tap, tap, with my hands I clap, clap, clap"—while Tony listened to farts exploded out of a cheap instrument by an unwilling boy. I saw the curtain of faded chintz that separated the "studio" from the little room with the sink and hot plate. I saw Tony and Sherry (thought to be a little on the flashy side) grown to forty, still holding tight to a New York concept of themselves, eating out in bad restaurants, playing the accordion and singing at weddings in the BPOE Hall.

Tony came in and said, "How about a drink."

"I don't have a thing in the house."

"Look around, Baby. . . ," and she went directly to the closet and brought out the bottle.

So the next time I came to New York Tony was unable to work, though he still came in at four o'clock in his tux. Sherry had set him to songwriting, where the real money was. On top of a Steinway she had rented for him there were three songs pencilled out—notes, lyrics, titles and all—"Why so Bitter My Sweet?", "When Bonnie Comes Marching Home" (about a WAC who left her love behind), and "Love Letters in the Sky" (a pilot who is afraid to declare his feelings except when he is gunning Japs in a B-47). Tony's socks and underwear were all over the bedroom, his razor on the sink, and he slept in the bed where I had last seen

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Little Dot propped up with pillows memorizing the score of *Cosi fan Tutte*. I can't say that I was shocked, for I don't suppose that even *I* thought they had been playing post-office all this time. That night Tony was snarly, got drunk, passed out on the living-room floor, and we had to drag him to bed. Sherry loosened his shirt collar, took off his shoes, and smoothed that wild forelock back out of his eyes with hands that had once been soft.

"Poor Tony. . . ," she said looking at me, and we both knew that things weren't going to improve.

When he left her she went on the road with a second company of the show, singing those bright songs all over the country, dancing and whooping, shouting out about the beautiful morning. She made a movie which I saw eight times. When Dane Clark entered a small night club she said "Good Evening," and tried to check his hat.

"Where the boss?" Dane asked.

"Over at the bar," Sherry answered. Later she screamed when the shots went off, an unconvincing shriek, and she wouldn't answer the hard old detective.

"I only work here, Mister."—Sherry was never good at répartee. Her features, blown up on the screen, were not the common doll-face the role called for: her high cheek bones and cleft chin were too powerful facing the perceptive camera: she looked as if she had wandered into this contrived piece out of a drama on the Irish Revolution—moving close-ups of faces with "character," damp, darkness and meaningful death.

My mother and the aunts weren't much for movies, and I never let on that Mary Elizabeth could be seen down at Poli's because I knew that all they'd go for was the net stockings, the cleavage, the "low types" wished into existence by their literal minds. I cut my class in "Great Thinkers of the Western World" to study what I saw in Sherry's eyes—the crease of doubt forming on her brow, the air of acceptance in the droop of her bare shoulders. Though she was only twenty-three she had gone through one life already. I could see that, and I walked out of the theater while Dane Clark was still dying, while the lights were still on in the night classes at the high-school, illuminating the sophistries of Mr. Ruggiero and Miss Flynn as they argued free-will and determinism. The two-bit sax player was gone forever, and I hated him for the years he had taken from Sherry. Later, during her

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"mature" phase, she told me he had married a neighborhood girl out on Staten Island and had two kids and worked in a shoe store.

Sol was a loud-mouth puffed eunuch who had great success in shaping the careers of female comics, and he was sure that what Sherry had was a flair for dancing a kind of rag-doll in a Baby-Snooks routine he had devised, the surprise being that when she pulled off the Harpo Marx wig and the Harold Lloyd glasses there was a real pretty girl who sang a couple of sweet ballads. It was blistering hot the night Sol and Sherry and I went down to the Village to show the act to a very big man who was opening a new club. Sol advised Sherry on her costume in a lilting falsetto.

"The simple backless number, Dear . . . no jewels . . . ruins your neck," and he pursed his lips in disgust at me, done up in my best Bemberg sheer:

"Why don't you go to a newsreel?"

But I went along, paid the cab driver, and watched from a leopard-skin booth while Sol and Sherry dealt with the very big man. The club was to be a jungle with a lot of African masks, bamboo tables that caught the stockings, and a ceiling weighted with oppressive greenery. A pair of caged monkeys chattered over the bar.

"Zow, *some* people!" Sherry cried out in an effeminate voice, an imitation of *Maitre* Sol. She slid onto the dance floor as if kicked in the seat of the pants and attempted to get up on rubber legs; she pulled a great big Times Square funny comb from no-place and further mucked up her blonde wig.

"I'm gonna sing a little song," she said with a croak in her throat.

"Why don't you Voo-Do-Do what you did did did before. . . ."

I walked out to the street where a gang of little children in filthy underpants were working to unscrew a fire hydrant. I thought I could watch anything as long as it wasn't Sherry clowning in the veldt, but the sight of the screaming kids—sweaty, no doubt tired, for it was past ten—nauseated me and brought to mind the six grey molluscs (the color of their dirty hands) I had swallowed whole at the Oyster Bar. Sad they seemed, those oysters, exposed on their icy bed and wanting nothing more than to contract into the known darkness. Slowly I went to the hydrant and we pulled together: the straining little fingers and my own scrawny hands; we

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pulled in a hush of effort until the geyser shot into the sleepless night-city. Squealing with relief the children performed a frantic dance; shiny bare limbs, freshened, made clean.

The audition—that's what they called it—was over when I went back. Sol and the very big man sat on rattan stools at the bar celebrating their mutual distrust. They toasted Sherry with Cuba Libres. I watched from behind the glistening leaves of a paper tree.

"I'm glad you like the act," Sherry said—that good face full of hope once more.

"We'll talk about the act, Honey," the big man reassured her with several pats on the fleshy part of her back.

"Oooo, you naughty boys," Sol chided the monkeys who were very busy in their cage; and then they saw me in the mirror, my dress shrunk up over my knees, my hair soaked into kinks, an untamed freak of nature after a tropical storm.

After the war there were two musicals; one closed in Boston, the other petered out in the City before I got to see her. Then Sherry sang, restrained, intimate, in supper clubs—which was less embarrassing than most of her ventures—and it was in this role of sophisticated *chanteuse* that the Colonel discovered her. Beneath the show-biz patina and the undercoat of spoiled innocence he detected the expansive, natural girl. The Colonel had wives; oh yes, but no woman challenged him like Mary Elizabeth. That was his trade: he had rebuilt a European city from the ruins of war and occupation, restored its dignity with a fine respect for history, set it to live and grow once again. Now he was revitalizing a great newspaper that was sick unto death. He was rich and bright and powerful.

The marriage came as a surprise, a telegram I found opened on the hall table when I returned from work one day. My mother's voice called out to me with a tremble of excitement:

"Ag—Ag, is that you?" She was on the phone, and it must have been a difficult moment for her, not knowing whether to continue her damnation of Mary Elizabeth—satisfying in the mouth like chocolate creams—or to come hustling through the dining-room to exact testimony from me of her depravity. The verdict she had already reached.

"Don't you tell me you never saw the man on one of your sneaky 'visits,' Ag Keely."

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"I never even has heard of him," I said in my grandmother's jibing brogue.

"Throw insults on the grave—that's good, Miss."

"I don't know who he is."

My mother plumped herself out like a proud fat pigeon. "That name," she said with malicious pleasure—"He's a Jew!"

The Colonel was a Jew, but all that was left was a story now and again with a Yiddish expression and a dreamy painting by Chagall hanging in the dining-room over a fine carved cabinet (which I was expected to admire).

Was Sherry Catholic any more? The question was irrelevant. Her new mode was ultimately enlightened, free of the limitations of any simple identity. The first time I saw Sherry and Colonel Leavit together I tried to understand the cosmopolitan perfection he aimed at, but in minutes my head was fuzzed by martinis and I felt the three of us floating in a soft white room to a melody plucked from a fragile box.

He was fifty, Colonel Harry, Daddy of All the Ages; he wanted the best for his little orphan girl (even *that* was in a literary tradition), and he never failed to have something in his pocket for me too—the rag-picker cousin.

"We can't use our tickets to the Philharmonic, Mary Agnes," he'd tell me. "I want you to come down here and enjoy yourself. Bring a friend."

"Oh, Harry, she can't just hop a train," Sherry said.

She was right. Still the offer was like a crisp five dollar bill.

He was fifty. That didn't seem old: it seemed right. His head was a phrenologist's dream, bare and gleaming, with bumps that I read—without even knowing the science—as intelligence, creativity, success. And since he had no hair, one looked hard at his face: lean, composed, a model of a commander whose kindly eyes made the people around him want to perform in style. His whole body was lean, and I never knew until Sherry told me—oh much later—that he worked out at a gym every day.

I don't know why I found that disappointing; he worked damn hard at the "image" of himself, as hard as he now worked on the ailing newspaper or had worked over the demolished city. Those quiet evenings I was invited to share—they were carefully conceived. His scheme for Sherry was delicate, but its process was

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superhuman, and of all his plans the only one she took to was the study of music: she learned to play the harpsichord.

"Tasteful beginners' pieces," he said, " . . . nicely done all the same." He knew her voice was good only for a few songs after dinner, so we listened to her in a white drawing-room sing sad short *lieder* in memorized German. To me it was all strange and perfect, and like the thick herbaceous liqueur I rolled on my tongue I believed in it; but surely the Colonel knew that their life came out of bad historical novels.

"Tomorrow let us ride over to the Manor House in the pony cart."

"Oh yes, that will be gay," Miss Agnes said, letting drop her needlework that she might dream a while of her new bonnet, looking very pretty indeed in the orangery.

Gold flowers blooming in gold pots, Sherry in a green velvet gown, covering her arms to the wrists, open at the throat. Her look says, "Ain't it the berries, Ag!" And the Colonel, in a smoking jacket, talks of pleasure: *his*—in having me with them—"one of the people Sherry loves."

Other treasures: a frieze of saints given by a grateful city—part of itself—to take away with him; the edition of *Parnasse contemporain* bound in pearly leather—"of particular interest to you. . . ." The wine I couldn't possibly know . . . everything real in the way heaven must be: softly lit, with one all-caring God.

Their bed (I see it when led off to wash the Chateau Lafite Rothschild out of my sweater) is big enough for an army of lovers, high up on a dais—a throne yes, but to me more like the altar in my parish church, its canopy hung with starched lace, thick embroidered initials on the spread: His and Hers intertwined, scrambled. I saw IHS: Harry, Sherry, Leavit, the bottom nodule of the "L" strangely shortened for the sake of the design. "To God who giveth joy to my life." Maybe it was that: ascending those green (for hope) carpeted steps onto the consecrated kingsize mattress—was that what became impossible?

At the table Sherry, now learned in sauces and salads, had to be followed closely as to which fork—and that peculiar small knife for a russet pear with the leaves left on, or a platinum-blond apple; and grapes (Lord, they must be fake), frosty, purply. But no!—she cuts them apart with a scissors! The salt sits in open silver shells with midget spoons, and the coffee cups are doll-size.

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Sherry *tried* with all that food and wine business, but she never could make herself eat the special smelly cheeses—or brains or kidneys or sweetbreads. I could tell just the way she ate—not seeing the elaborate entrees the Colonel ordered—veal and chicken and tongue: larded, farced, and truffled in glossy gelatine—that she might as well be eating Mac's overcooked meat loaf swimming in canned tomatoes. She hid peanut butter in a jar labeled Queen Bee Hormone Jelly, and Ritz crackers under her lingerie.

"It's a terrible sign of a regression, Ag. . . ." The Colonel had sent her to a Park Avenue psychiatrist so she'd know all about herself—as well as George III tea pots and pre-Colombian sculpture. She wasn't always happy—Colonel Harry knew that, admired it even—and no doubt he expected the analysis to tap a vein of hidden meanings and obscure desires in his beautiful girl. But Sherry was still a "C" student: she took to the idea in her own way, began to read inspirational literature, do-it-yourself salvation kits. Harry was infuriated; he had given her Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

He staged a quiet evening of Camus—I was included—and she bubbled over about "inner resources" and "building towards personal maturity."

"I'm going to send you this book, Mary Agnes, by this woman. . ."

"Now my Darling," the Colonel said; "Mary Agnes knows she can charge any book she wants on my account at Brentano's."

"Yes, Harry . . . By this woman, Ag, this wonderful woman whose child died of leukemia."

Her recommended readings arrived at our house, and I found the books opened on the hall table—the Overstreets and Norman Vincent Peale—and I heard my mother behind her evening paper.

"Protestant. . . ," and, making what was to her a logical connection, "Jew." I put the books, which seemed sticky with childish optimism, under my bed; my mother never dusted there because her heart started racing. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph . . . no one to help an old woman."

At night after I had escaped into my homework from the endless days of my life at the zipper factory, I fell asleep under my student lamp and I heard Sherry call from her stack of goodness-readings under the bed (where as a girl she used to hide her contraband movie magazines):

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"Say, Mr. and Mrs. North are over at the Rialto, Ag—Let's go; I'll get twenty cents easy if I sing down at the firehouse."

" . . . just because a person has been disturbed by a difficult family situation doesn't mean that they have to react to a relationship without commitment. . . ." Sherry was on her favorite theme, and I could see the Colonel's disappointment as he suffered the obvious phrases she had picked up on the couch. He was bewildered by defeat.

"Well, what did you expect," I thought; "there's nothing in my cousin for a doctor to heal. Sherry is all surface. That's what's great about her: if she's sad, there are tears, a black mood that clears at the first dose of peanut butter. And she is happy every time she puts on that big mink coat you gave her. You know the smile."

We were both wrong: the Colonel for wanting her complex, and I was a fool to think that she was simple.

For five years I journeyed to the City when I could get loose, partook of their hospitable dream, became one of the mottled images reflected in that ancient mirror which Colonel Leavit hung at the end of his palatial salon. Thirty, I was thirty years old (which would have made her thirty-one), and by then the Colonel had built up several anemic industries. Projecting into the future, he saw the growth-potential in fiberglass, in pre-fab houses, in tranquilizers, in television; and he began to take a lady painter—Bryn Mawr and boring to Sherry—out to fashionable restaurants while his wife went to bed with headaches. He escorted Little Dot to the opening night of the Metropolitan Opera. And then, when he flew out to the Coast to buy old Academy Award pictures, Sherry produced the grand finale.

"What will I say to Harry?" she asked, and turned the question into a tipsy song, "What'll I tell Harry, Harry. . . ." She stumbled through forgotten dance routines.

"Nothing, I guess."

She wouldn't have to say a thing: all the kids were there, even Little Dot, who didn't stay long because she was much too fine for them now, but all the lamp-tanned chorus girls and all the dainty men who had not aged a minute, and Sol and Jerry and some of the way-back USO girls who were married now and brought their husbands in from the suburbs for free eats, and lots

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of people no one had ever seen before. Sandwiches ground into the aubusson carpets, club soda spilled into the harpsichord, and all those wines were pulled out of the carved cabinet from their tilted mellowing sleep and drunk like gallons of *paesano*. On one side of the bed there was a blind man who played the electric organ in nightclubs. He sat up stiffly, laughing and drinking, his white cane stuck through the lace. Someone had tied a brassiere on his head, and behind him on a pile of coats a girl was cruelly used. I didn't want to see more, so I left my good coat and walked out in the rain.

How did Sherry look: desiccated, hard, a hearty bitch? Not at all. She looked frail from the trying years of a fraudulent marriage, stretched in the neck and arms, bones and veins without much flesh, but with hair the color of red maples, and her song, "Tell Harry, Harry. . . ," was gay.

She had walked out, way beyond his control, away from the elaborate parlor game he had made into the good life. The act was over for me too, and I regretted that mutation of reality which had made our evenings together a séance—on my part a dabbling in the mysterious and occult. For a while there had been no factory, no zippers, no dinners at Sticky-bun Inn where you presented Therese Selinski with an orchid corsage and a Mirro-Matic Pressure Cooker and wishes for many sunny days of married life. With no mother, no Lil, no Mae with a breast removed; without them you are sinking into the white softness, your body suspended in a million goose feathers sewn in sacks of sky blue silk. Think now of what you learn and what you read: Blake in night school, Villon in translation. You will speak through them to us, misty-footed angel: in your mouth are the phonemes of a strange mellifluous language. You will transform the ugliness of our landscape; you will tell us what it means. . . . Speak, monkey, speak—and I moaned from my horrifying past.

"My name is Bridie Murphy." It ended so. No more artichokes, no more golden apples; only the reality of Florence Flynn and Mr. Ruggiero—my intellectual milieu—squabbling in the high-school, this time about D. H. Lawrence in Modern British "Lit."

"One individual has a responsibility not to destroy the core of

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another individual," Sherry explained after the divorce. "Harry wanted me to look his way, act his way, but he didn't care anything about me inside."

"No," I said. We were having lunch at Stouffer's on Fifth Avenue after my morning with Shakespeare at Columbia. I had the distinct impression that all around us the ladies were talking about their lives in this way, or about their clothes—as important as their lives.

"He never understood that he must respect me as a person." She wore a floppy brown hat that covered up her hair, and the mink coat was thrown over the back of her chair. I had not seen her out in the daylight in many years, and on the avenue the winter sun had caught every line. The girl that Colonel Leavit had preserved in candlelight was gone. Sherry could have been any faded beauty; the spectacle was over.

"Yes," I said.

"I feel I can breathe again, Ag, and dance. Listen, I have this wonderful voice coach, a sweetheart who says he can get me right back to work—not that I have to, but it's my old compulsion—Harry never touched it—of having to give myself. . . ."

"Yes," I said. We must have looked a sight, me hunched over a parfait, skinny and dry, probably in one of those sexy knit suits I wore to fool the public, and Sherry wiping the floor with mink, wearing the biggest diamond in the world—third finger right hand.

"The Colonel never had friends. They were always business connections pretending to be buddies. It wasn't all Boccherini and Belgian endive, I'll tell you, Ag."

"Gosh!"

Her new apartment was in a shining glass building on Sutton Place, as friendly as a hospital, with the instruments for living laid out about the white walls: plastic wood tables at the end of the couch, a deep Naugahide chair with a stand big enough for an ashtray and a drink. Here the portly men sat with their scotch-and-sodas, bourbons-on-the-rocks, gin-and-bitters. They were all "sweethearts," "real cuties" who wanted to help a girl out. She went to Acapulco for rest and sunshine with an advertising man who put her in a detergent commercial.

I left my books to watch my mother as she watched Sherry (she never recognized her) as a worried housewife in a laundro-

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mat, a pleasant woman aging fast with the problems of sink stain and bathroom odor. Soil and deep-down grime drove her nearly to tears.

"I just can't seem to get things *clean* any more." Then up came a snappy dish with a pile of whiter-than-white towels and laughed right in Sherry's face.

"Why don't you use the new miracle tablet, a combination of gentle bleach and power-plus detergents that makes laundry day the happiest day in the week."

"A tablet? Not on *these* filthy collars!" Sherry held up a shirt ringed with greasy body dirt.

My mother heaved herself out of her chair and hurried to the kitchen. Now that she had grown so *very* big her walk was labored and she put out her hand for support, first on the back of a dining-room chair and then on the buffet.

"Want anything, Ag?"

How delighted Mary Elizabeth looked, and she chuckled with Mrs. Goody-Two Shoes, right there in our front room with the filet curtains and the furniture, the same as when she left.

"I guess my troubles are over," Sherry said, but she was a bad actress and the line didn't ring true. I felt when she left the laundromat she was doomed to droopy tresses or nasal congestion; and what's more she knew it.

Mother was having a run on jelly doughnuts in the months Sherry's commercial was shown and she would come back with two soft clumps oozing scarlet tapioca jelly.

"Have one, Ag."

"I couldn't."

"Aren't you going to hear the weather?" she asked as I went back to my studies. "Well, I'm sure I'm privileged to have got a look at you at all."

I wasn't a girl any more and night-time visits to New York had lost their charm. After a few expense-account dinners with Sherry and one of her "sweethearts" I gave it up. Should I say I gave her up? Anything I had to say to her would sound preachy, the envious moralizing of an old maid, and why should I accuse her when she could still riffle through the bottom drawer of used emotions and come up with that best of smiles meaning jolly days, tomorrow, just around the corner. Her personal psychology was as out of date as the depression song she used to sing about a pocket full of

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dreams. The world had changed on her. There was an insatiable lust for things: great-assed cars, freezing chests like coffins, magic boxes; love-play in the supermarket, sexual poking at sealed meats and cake mixes, the thrill of climax as the register rings—the check-out counter. She didn't know what was happening, and I closed my door, unable and unwilling to cope with her life or mine. I had something of a problem at this time: Jim Neary, son of one of my mother's cronies, went so far as to declare an interest in stumping into the future with me. He had a limp and taught the fifth grade. He gave me a bottle of Blue Grass Cologne and a little collie dog, but that is another story of misplaced trust and self-destruction, a melodrama starring my brother Francis (now an FBI agent) and my mother who breaks her hip in a cemetery outside of Buffalo.

To be honest, I had not talked to Sherry in years. Waiting for Tony I had talked *at* her; I had talked *around* her with the Colonel, but all I had said directly to my cousin was "Gee Whiz!"—a line straight out of the funny papers delivered with a look of bug-eyed amazement long after she ceased to amaze. I discovered more of the City in daylight after my Saturday-morning class at Columbia than I had in all the years of her nightlife, which now seemed trite for both of us. I'm sure it was as hard for Sherry to go on with the show—pulling out new wonders for the relative from out-of-town—as it was for me to come on all incredulous at out-sized menus and happy-pills. What she had in mind now that she was free was a come-back, this time off-Broadway, the real theater—Art. The last time I saw her she was sitting on the floor surrounded by piles of new paperbacks: Brecht, Ionesco, Genet, and the plays of Yeats. The man in the Naugahide chair (Scotch Manhattans and ladies' sportswear) smirked indulgently, said his daughter was interested in all that up at Sarah Lawrence. I said I had to get my train, but Sherry with her brand new smile asked, "What do you think, Ag? Now that I won't have to play the *ingenue*?"

Almost a year later the Christmas card came with a drawing of a parrot in a golden cage. "Season's Greetings from Sherry Leavit and Jamie."

Since I never envisioned her cleaning a cage and setting out parrot food, I presumed there was a new "sweetheart" in her life—until she telephoned late one January night.

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"Glory be to God!" My mother held her hand where she imagined her heart was. "I thought it was something wrong with Francis or one of the children."

"Wonderful," I said.

"This is the break I've been waiting for." Sherry used the same old words the same old way. "You'll see it in the papers, but the show isn't announced yet. It's got everyone: Merman, Leonard Bernstein."

"Gee!"

"It's tremendous, exciting. Listen to Jamie. Listen to beautiful Baby; he was so happy for me I cried; honest, he *knows* that something great has happened. Listen to Jamie." I listened to Jamie's gutteral squawks, which grew louder and soared to a piercing crescendo.

"Are you going to sing?" I asked, turning my back on my bird of prey, who was pretending to watch the Late Show. There was a flapping and scratching at the other end.

"It's not quite set, Ag. *The Gershwin Years* is a whole ninety minutes, a spectacular, and of course they need lots of kids."

"Wonderful!"

"He's right here on my shoulder, my baby Jamie."

She had given her heart for the last time.

"Lord forgive me," mother said, "I thought it was Francis."

Sherry was right, I couldn't have missed *The Gershwin Years,* one of those cultural gestures on behalf of the network and a paternalistic oil company. I didn't say a word at home and—small wonder—my mother went over to Mae's, lured by fudgy brownies. Alone in the darkness I waited for Sherry; girls swayed and sang, girls with giant Ziegfeld plumes wafted down the glittering stairs of our M-G-M dreams; girls drifted through arty mobiles in leotards. They were all young—Sherry fifteen years ago—with painted inexpressive faces and elastic bodies—a lifetime removed from the beautiful woman with a past, weighted with mink and diamonds in Stouffer's, picking her way through the days with a man or a parrot or another hope.

"George Gershwin came up from the lower East Side, from a confining study of the classics to the restless jazzy world of discordant newness. . . ." It went on like that, a man's voice giving me all this about the American dream, the search, fulfillment; but the first half hour was over and I had not seen Sherry. Then the

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scenes from *Porgy and Bess*—nothing doing there unless they put her in black face. I looked at the screen so damn hard—more young girls swooping about the Eiffel Tower. I thought I had missed her, perhaps unrecognizable behind a feathery fan, disguised by a boa—and then I thought, my God, she never made it —all these kids jumping around and Sherry out of the business for so many years.

Ten minutes left, and my solemn commentator grew more lugubrious as he spoke again of Paris in the twenties: Gershwin had wanted much more than success. . . , O.K., O.K., yes, Fitzgerald, Picasso, Hemingway, Joyce, and as our own greatest spokesman for the expatriates, Gertrude Stein, said: "Everybody was twenty-six. Hemingway was twenty-six. I was twenty-six. The world was twenty-six." It was Mary Elizabeth reading the words out in a high faltering voice, toneless, uncomprehending. It was so bad, but I counted on Sherry not knowing.

Come to think of it, I counted on a lot: on an unbroken line that I followed, like a child's puzzle in which you draw your pencil from 1 to 2 to 3, through a maze of numbers and come out with the not so very hidden picture of our pig-eyed house snuggled in nightmare juxtaposition up to the zipper factory—mother supporting the whole teetering works, old Atlas of the daily continuum. I counted on some freshly shaven gent with a Sulka tie to tell Sherry how talented she was, though maybe her style was more in the Arlene Francis line: wit and chiffon. I counted on getting up and going to work and coming home to Henry James. I counted on Sherry slipping into her mink coat and eating a peanut butter sandwich. I counted on the only death being inside me, an increasing numbness of some mysterious vital organ, like Tony De Angelo's kidney or liver or pancreas. But Sherry didn't even bother to switch off the set. She went straight to the medicine cabinet of her luxury bathroom, and when the woman who ran the vacuum over the wall-to-wall carpet came in she found the daytime *Price Is Right* blaring and thought that strange because usually if Mrs. Leavit was up she liked the old movies.

They notified the Colonel, who was in Washington about a contract for nose cones, and by the time her show-biz friends remembered my name she was buried in a non-sectarian cemetery on Long Island. A man I'd never heard of called me at the office

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and I took the next bus to Bridgeport and changed to a mid-morning train to New York—though I can't think why. When the superintendent let me into Sherry's apartment he drew back the curtains, and there was the bright spring East River, sunlight on the water, green branches along the embankment. A toy tug fitted out with little men hauled a flat black freighter out to the sea—gay flags, a pretty world from this height, like the magic blackness embroidered with stars and strings of electric lights which had been Sherry's.

In a while the Colonel came with Little Dot. She was anxious about a rehearsal of *Traviata* at City Center.

"Harry dear," she said, "perhaps Miss Keely would like something of Sherry's." They offered a brooch I had never seen her wear, but then there were demanding screams from the bedroom, and we ran in to find Jamie—yellow and red and green with glassy eyes. He was in a flap and repeated again and again words we had not been trained to understand. Little Dot, always the prima donna, glanced at her watch.

"We called the ASPCA and I thought somehow that we should be here. Harry or someone. . . ." Then she looked at me with a wan smile, perfect for the last act, the final brave aria.

"Would you like him? Would you like the bird?"

I said I found him disgusting. Colonel Leavit, full of understanding, brought me out to the living-room again. He picked up his topcoat of some rich wonderful material, and said by way of consolation, "She was beautiful, beautiful."

"Yes."

We looked around at her plain room before we left, for Little Dot had decided that, after all, the doorman could deal with the parrot.

"Terrible place," the Colonel said, "no character."

I telephoned Francis from Grand Central, and as soon as I heard his voice I knew I would not have to tell him about Mary Elizabeth. He had read it in the paper.

"Don't say anything to them at home—please Francis, that's just what they'd like."

He said yes, and then asked, "Tell me Ag, was there time— did she have a priest?"

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JAMES DICKEY

Pursuit From Under

Often, in these blue meadows,
I hear what passes for the bark of seals

And on August week-ends the cold of a personal ice age
Comes up through my bare feet
Which are trying to walk like a boy's again
So that nothing on earth can have changed
On the ground where I was raised.

The dark grass here is like
The pads of mukluks going on and on

Because I once burned kerosene to read
Myself near the North Pole
In the journal of Arctic explorers
Found, years after death, preserved
In a tent, part of whose canvas they had eaten

Before the last entry.
All over my father's land

The seal-holes sigh like an organ,
And one entry carries more terror
Than the blank page that signified death
In 1912, on the ice-cap.
It says that, under the ice,

The killer whale darts and distorts,
Cut down by the flawing glass

To a weasel's shadow,
And when, through his ceiling, he sees
Anything darker than snow
He falls away
To gather more and more force

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From the iron depths of cold water,
His shadow dwindling

Almost to nothing at all, then charges
Straight up, looms up at the ice and smashes
Into it with his forehead
To splinter the roof, to isolate seal or man
On a drifting piece of the floe

Which he can overturn.
If you run, he will follow you

Under the frozen pane,
Turning as you do, zigzagging,
And at the most uncertain of your ground
Will shatter through, and lean,
And breathe frankly in your face

An enormous breath smelling of fish.
With the stale lungs staining your air

You know the unsaid recognition
Of which the explorers died:
They had been given an image
Of how the downed dead pursue us.
They knew, as they starved to death,

That not only in the snow
But in the family field

The small shadow moves,
And under bare feet in the summer:
That somewhere the turf will heave,
And the outraged breath of the dead,
So long held, will form

Unbreathably around the living.
The cows low oddly here

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As I pass, a small bidden shape
Going with me, trembling like foxfire
Under my heels and their hooves.
I shall write this by kerosene,
Pitch a tent in the pasture, and starve.

Faces Seen Once

Faces seen once are seen

To fade from around one feature,
Leaving a chin, a scar, an expression

Forever in the air beneath a streetlight,
Glancing in boredom from the window
Of a bus in a country town,
Showing teeth for a moment only,
All of which die out of mind, except
One silver one.

Who had the dog-bitten ear?
The granulated lids? The birthmark?

Faces seen once change always

Into and out of each other:
An eye you saw in Toulon
Is gazing at you down a tin drainpipe
You played with as a dull child
In Robertstown, Georgia.
There it is April; the one eye

Concentrates, the rusty pipe

Is trembling; behind the eye
Is a pine tree blurring with tears:

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You and someone's blue eye
Transforming your boyhood are weeping
For an only son drowned in warm water
With the French fleet off Senegal.
Soon after, the cancer-clamped face
Of your great-grandfather relaxes,

Smiles again with the lips of a newsboy.
Faces seen once make up

One face being organized

And changed and known less all the time,
Unsexed, amorphous, growing in necessity
As you deepen in age.
The brow wrinkles, a blind, all-knowing
Questioning look comes over it,
And every face in the street begins

To partake of the look in the eyes,

Every nose is part of that nose
And changes the nose; every innocence and every

Unspoken-of guilt goes into it,
Into the face of the one
Encountered, unknowable person who waits
For you all over the world,
In coffee-shops, filling-stations, bars,
In mills and orphan asylums,

In hospitals, prisons, at parties,
Yearning to be one thing.

At your death, they—it is there,

And the features congeal,
Having taken the last visage in,
Over you, pre-testing its smile,

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The skin the indwelling no
Color of all colors mingled,
The eyes asking all there is.

Composed, your own face trembles near

Joining that other, knowing
That finally something must break

Or speak. A silver tooth gleams;
You mumble, whispering "You
Are human, are what I have witnessed.
You are all faces seen once."
Through the bent, staring, unstable dark
Of a drainpipe, Unity hears you—

A God-roar of hearing—say only
"You are an angel's too-realized

Unbearable memoryless face."

DARYL HINE

Plain Fare

(Night Thoughts on Crossing the Continent by Bus)

How slow they are awakening, these trees,
This earth, how late they sleep
Naked. Past the window of the bus
Where wide and nameless rivers interrupt
The plain that divided us, they stretch
Like determined sluggards muttering, 'Not Yet'.

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America, the work of a magic realist,
Make of it what you will:
The vast and apparently pointless construction
By whom—when—for what purpose begun?
The little figures beside it to give an idea of scale;
And behind, before, about like a canvas the plain.
It is disquieting to think of anyone living here,
And the lights one sees
Rare in the darkness to unbelievable lives belong.
We too flash on their incredulity and are gone,
Cowboy and farmer buried alive in their rest
And me sitting up all night reading *Villette*.

Sometime before dawn another stop, for breakfast—
Country ham
And eggs—where the unfledged travellers
Wait, their faces turned from one another
In a fine balance between friend and enemy, equally nameless,
For coffee, with weary contempt and despair.

The waitress is slow, friendly but inefficient,
The boy is impressed,
He only knows why, with these sorry unworldly exiles.
Both smile, harried and shy. It is time,
There are miles to go before morning, but no hurry.
We have ceased to believe in arrival. I ask for tea
And must decide between milk and lemon. 'Voyage'
I used to think had
To derive from the French verb *voir* 'to see',
But blind as the best I stumble back to my seat
On the bus, take up *Villette,* switch on the overhead
Light and light yet one more cigarette.

—To be puzzled and a trifle disappointed.
The eponymous heroine
Turns out to be a place called 'little city'
—Why not just Brussels, which obviously it is?
This is the saddest book, I think, I ever read. On
The cover it says that Charlotte Bronte,

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After the death of Emily, Anne and Branwell
And before her marriage and death a year after,
'Wrote this history of lost love'.
    And when I look up
Mine is the only light still burning in the bus
Where my faceless fellow travellers and, outside, the country slumber.

. . . It is day, and the lights and roadside structures have vanished.
The novel is finished and the reasons no longer exist
    For my visit. From heaven
Out of sight an audible jet
Covers in a mere hour or so
The way that I could not afford to go.

PHILIP BOOTH

Voyages

Butt-down on granite,
facing a weathered sea,
I breathe as slow as rock.

Harbor is one way to look;
but voyages wash my eye,
and old tides rock my butt.

Gulls root on the ledge,
taught by every wind
how spruces tug; snails

hug the tideline—hulls
on their own horizon—bound
as I am to the very edge.

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HAROLD WITT

A Fly is Eyeing Me

A fly is eyeing me, a bulbous
black, severalfooted, greenglinting common
housefly that's flown
from festering pestilence, a felon

if human, and if magnified
legged like sawteeth, but with wings
fine veined, and filmy as lace.
He looks as he seems

washing that criminal face,
catlike, Cleopatra vain,
but monstrous, a villain from space—
formed by a force that's insane

with conflict or sly with opposites
to have tongued him with this
little black sliver
for delivering death's kiss

and loosed his swarm
to sip the warm juices of corpses and dung
and speckle our summer,
a nerve raw hum in the sun.

He strolls on my book like a fat, hairy bather
at a white margin,
gazing blazeward or
drowsy with dinner

considering sleep, or in some corner,
the sewer of his brothers,
adding his ordure.
Swat, spray, or otherwise

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trap by a handcupping sleight,
he's back with an army of angers
rainbowed by light
and, aside from his dangers,

something about him is sylph-
lovely, transforming turds
to jewelries of filth,
rich in his sheens as some birds

if we can forget his vices—
a not impossible thing,
to separate satanic uses
from the beauty of a wing.

Climate of Murder

Powered with that phase, I faced the morning,
a David to the giant just beyond,
his huge sinewed foot, his unseen storming
beginning to shiver the leaves and ripple the pond
as I, with my righteous rock, with heart for his harming,
aimed for the place I knew from the rising sound,

like music that troubles, his presence was sure to appear,
the face of violence necked to his muscular shoulder,
the glistening force of his torso coarsened with hair,
and tense with his immanent image, fear made me bolder,
suspense like a harpstring twanged through uncertain air
that turned, in that climate of murder, suddenly colder.

But what I hit when I swung was never quite clear—
a downrush like splintering cedar crashed to the ground,
a smashing of limbs, then silence that hung like a mirror,
and instead of the dying giant my cleverness stoned
the one I saw stare back was a smaller figure,
the astounded marksman wounded, equally doomed.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

SINCE THE NEGRO "PROTEST NOVEL" HAS BEEN AROUND FOR SOME TIME, our theatre, which nowadays follows fiction at a respectful distance, could have been expected at this point to erupt with the Negro "protest play." Accordingly, we now have on Broadway James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*, and off-Broadway, LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman*.

A "protest play," unfortunately, always has a hard time of it artistically, and even more so if, like Baldwin, the playwright doth protest too much. And not only too much but too much, too soon. Right at the outset we are clobbered with a tirade which is an inflammatory inventory of all the injustices toward the Negro, and, justified as these grievances are, they strike a false note: you do not paint a picture that is to be a work of art with air brush and poster paint—unless, that is, you are a pop artist—and Baldwin would shudder at the thought of having written a pop-art play. But that is what it is: agit-prop art.

Baldwin is undoubtedly one of our ablest essayists and literary journalists—terms I use with respect—but as a novelist he has always struck me as a failure, and a progressively worse one, at that. Somewhere hedged in by fact and opinion lies the domain of fiction, which is neither brute reality nor the spinning out of speculation, however profound or piercing. In fiction—and in drama, too—certain moods, experiences, states of being and insights achieve a solidity of texture through psychological exactness, tasteful selection of detail, architectural structuring, and (most important, though least definable) a poetic sensitivity to words. In these things, Baldwin is more or less deficient, and his assumption of the mantle of embattled prophethood and the consequent thickening of his voice have made matters worse.

Blues for Mister Charlie is the story of Richard, a Southern Negro minister's son, who, disgusted with his father's weak-kneed acceptance of the killing of his wife by whites as a mere accident, goes North. In eight years there, he has been a successful jazz musician and conqueror of numerous white women; revolted by them, he takes to dope, loses his money, and finally submits to a voluntary but painful cure at Lexington State Hospital. The play proper concerns his return to his strife-torn home town, to which he brings an even more bristling vengefulness and hate. He clashes especially with a poor white shopkeeper, Lyle, the prototype of stolid backwardness and already the unprosecuted killer of a Negro whose wife he had made his mistress. Richard taunts Lyle and his dim, mousy wife, Jo, to the point where Lyle kills him. Parnell, the white newspaper-editor, Lyle's friend, is also a friend to the Negroes; in his youth, a Negro girl gave him his one bit of true happiness. He is now instrumental in bringing Lyle to

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trial. The dead boy's father, Reverend Meridian Henry, his girl Juanita, his grandmother, and various Negro friends perform bravely or cunningly in Richard's behalf at the phoney trial; but when even Parnell is sucked in, impotent, into this white conspiracy, Lyle is acquitted, only to boast afterward of being Richard's murderer. But at least, in defending his son, Reverend Henry has achieved true manhood, and the very violence that was in Richard has taught Juanita to love better—which, I suppose, means (if it means anything) to fight better.

The fact that the play begins with the shooting of Richard, and thence proceeds alternately forward and backward by a sort of free-associational movement is, in itself, neither good nor bad. The conventional flashbacks in the courtroom scene are, however, somewhat mechanistic; but this is not a serious flaw. Other things are. What is most serious is that the play pretends to be about racial injustice and the Negro's struggle for his human rights, while it is actually about something else. I am not saying that Baldwin is deliberately deceiving us, which would be bad enough, but that he is deceiving himself, which is, artistically speaking, worse.

It is, or ought to be, clear to anyone who reads Baldwin's fiction—and the author is, if anything, eager to reveal it—that what we have come to call normal sexuality is here found wanting. Plainly enough in *Giovanni's Room,* and still more so in *Another Country,* Baldwin has suggested the superiority of inversion over heterosexuality. Every man is, of course, entitled to his convictions and to the freedom of campaigning for them; but not when, disguised as in this drama, they masquerade as, and distort, other, more important ones. Thus Richard becomes a heroin addict not because of a sense of inferiority brutally imposed on Negroes, but because of some mysterious superiority of his over white women: their disgusting insufficiency in bed drives him from the embraces of these anti-heroines into the arms of heroin. Now there is no need for a Negro repelled by white women—dried-up, pale-arsed bitches, he calls them—to choose a remedy more drastic, and less logical, than simply switching to black women. If, instead, he picks dope, we might assume that mere women, or even men perhaps, cannot satisfy him: that there occurred some profound sexual fiasco.

In the first act alone there are some twenty references to the sexual inferiority of the whites and their consequent craving for Negroes; and, concomitantly, to the superiority of the Negroes, both sexual and—it follows like the night the day—human. Both the "bad" white, Lyle, and the "good" white, Parnell, can find fulfillment only with Negro women; Jo, the one important white woman in the play, is introduced as unyielding to her husband, objecting that he comes to her "grunting . . . in the wee small hours of the morning." Conversely, Juanita, the Negro heroine, pulsates with life and healthy sexuality, as do other Negro women mentioned in the play. But whenever a

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Negro girl is praised, like a certain Ruthie who, done in by whites, "is never again going to be the swinging little chick she used to be," the girl "swings." Now where is "swinging," i.e., promiscuity particularly common and esteemed? Richard says of white women, "I want to screw up their minds forever," and adds that he could hardly restrain himself from beating them to death (who, by the way, is corrupting whom?). Where is sexuality most apt to couple itself with sadism? One of the main themes of the play, stated climactically in Richard's dying words, is that the white man wants to cut off the Negro's genitals. Where, other than among women, is what the Freudians call penis envy most prominent?

It seems to me that *Blues for Mister Charlie* is a homosexual play, which would be fine if it came out and admitted it. But so far from doing this, it actually sneers at homosexuality: according to Richard, all white women, however eagerly they make love to Negroes, have "got some piss-assed, faggoty white boy on a string" whom they will cravenly marry. Yet persecuted blacks and persecuting whites seem to become subliminally identified with victimized but sexually free, noble homosexuals and tormenting, sexually frustrated heterosexuals; it is typical for the sexual misfit to blame the society's sexual mores for all his troubles. Why else would the racial issue be reduced here to sexual terms, and sex be seen as the true, secret strength of the Negro, the ultimate cause of white discrimination against him; fear and hatred based on sexual envy.

Out of this comes the most monumental falsification of all: the myth of Negro supremacy. Agreed that the myth of white supremacy is as unscientific as it is deleterious, but is the opposite myth any more justifiable, any more salubrious? It is one thing to fight fire with fire, but another to believe in fire—in its necessity, justice, excellence. Baldwin seems not merely to resort to fire, but to preconize it. The simple old Negro woman says of the whites: "I don't hate them no more. They too pitiful." The Negroes, says Reverend Henry, have no right to be as bad as "anybody else" because they "know better." The white editor tells the Negro preacher and his flock, "You must have mercy on us. We have no other hope." And so it goes: white arrogance must bow down before black arrogance, rather than all arrogance come to an end.

The private and public worlds of James Baldwin appear to have become hopelessly entangled in each other. And this confusion tends to be couched in language such as this, from Juanita's speech on the witness stand, "He fell on—fell on me—like life and death. My God. His chest, his belly, the rising and the falling, the moans. How he clung, how he struggled—life and death! Life and death! Why did it all seem to me like tears? That he came to me, clung to me, plunged into me, sobbing, howling, bleeding, somewhere inside his chest, his belly, and it all came out, came pouring out, like tears!" And so on,

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for some two pages of tendentious bombast. And night after night an audience of understandably hate-ridden Negroes and less understandably self-hate-crazed whites frantically applauds this piece of incendiary bad writing whose ineptitude even that inspired actress, Diana Sands, for all her passionate delivery, can scarcely mitigate.

Quite rightly, *Blues for Mister Charlie* was to have closed after a handful of performances. Promptly, however, some prominent but literarily, as well as literally, insensitive folk contributed sizable sums of money and took out large advertisements for the play, so that it now seems solidly ensconced: a triumph of bad taste and bad judgment. No one seems to have grasped the meaning heralded by the very title: blues for Mr. Charlie, i.e., a dirge for the white man, whom Negro slangs calls Mr. Charlie: a *Götterdämmerung* for the whole piss-assed, faggoty, or not faggoty enough, white race.

In LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman,* an intellectual, artistic young Negro is picked up on the subway by a weird, taunting white temptress. He is to take her along to a party he is going to, in exchange for which she'll later take him home and to her bed. The girl provokes him with jeers at his attempts to become assimilated into white society and culture; hers in a vicious combination of inviting nymphomania and castrating rejections. He finally explodes in a philippic hurled as much at some other white passengers as at the girl herself; when she further provokes him into swinging at her, it is she who pulls out a switchblade knife, kills him, and, with the help of the other passengers, dumps the body onto an empty platform. As the play ends, she has spotted another well-dressed, bookish young Negro who has just boarded the subway car, and she prepares to repeat the entire bloody ritual.

That the play is preposterous on the literal level is obvious enough. Yet allegory or symbolism, to be effective, must first function properly on the literal level. But does *Dutchman* work even figuratively? Does the white society woo the Negro with a mixture of promises and rebuffs only to destroy him utterly when he shows his just resentment? Perhaps. But it looks to me as if resentment were finally beginning to pay off. Whites, moreover, have been treating Negroes with a simpler, though no less damnable, cruelty. They have been neither so Machiavellian, nor so psychotic, as *Dutchman* implies. Add to this Jones's often consciously arty language and the vacuity of his symbols: the girl plies her victims with apples, an assembly-line Eve; the title presumably refers to the Flying Dutchman, but whether this describes the girl, fatally traveling up and down the subway line, or the boy, needing to be redeemed by the true love of a white girl, is unclear and, in either case, unhelpful. *Dutchman* and *Blues for Mister Charlie* are merely propaganda, which can add some fuel to a sometimes necessary fire; they are not truth, which alone can free us from our eternal enemy, ignorance.

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"The advantage of doing the King in the traditional Senecan style—the 'tyrant' rôle of Greek drama—is that we get the effect of something strong and imposing, almost monumental, with its own magnetism and power . . . " This plea against a "natural" King, voiced twenty-six years ago by Stark Young, was made on behalf of Claudius in *Hamlet;* how very much more urgently it must be made on behalf of the royal personage that dominates the early scenes of *King Lear.* But in the Royal Shakespeare Company's recent *King Lear,* the "royal" was confined to the name of the company. Peter Brook, the director, and Paul Scofield, the principal actor, have contrived a Lear who, if not exactly "natural," is stylized down rather than up.

Brook got the idea from the Polish critic Jan Kott, who perceives *Lear* as a play related to the "theatre of the absurd" and particularly to Beckett's *Endgame. Quot* (or Kott) *homines, tot sententiae,* and I am certainly not wanting in respect for the misotheist fantasies of the mirthfully macabre Irishman. But if anyone tells me that the pinnacle of English poetic drama—perhaps the greatest tragedy of all time—was merely laboring toward *Endgame,* I must exclaim with Kent, "Is this the promis'd end?" and smite that slanted Polack on the thin ice of his Marxist ideology. Brook, in any case, has gone about his Beckettizing and Brechtification systematically and ruthlessly, with the perverse predilection for the ghastly or unsavory that has generally marked his work. Accordingly, whatever is kindly must be excised. Cordelia must come on as arrogant in her modesty, Lear's knights must become teddy-boys smashing a seaside resort to bits, Albany an amorphous, lily-stomach'd weakling who vomits upon hearing ugly news, Gloucester a bigger fool even than intended. The lines in which his servants show Gloucester kindness are omitted in favor of cruelties directorially inserted; Edmund's conversion is cut; and so on, as if the readiness to cut were all. Conversely, whatever is evil must be mitigated, made natural and, if possible, attractive. Thus Regan and Goneril emerge almost more sinned against than sinning (there is some justification for this in the text, but not much); Edmund towers over Edgar almost to the very end; even Oswald is cruelly put upon by Lear, Kent and the knights, and his fight with Edgar is turned into an impressive, resourcefully choreographic affair. But the climactic duel between Edgar and Edmund is reduced to a little ritual Indian wrestling: the moment in the tragedy when right seems closest to winning out over wrong must not only be brief and inconclusive, as it already is—it must also be made uninteresting.

It is, of course, Lear himself who is obliged to suffer most from this leveling process. "That Titan spirit," as Granville-Barker called him, must be divested not only of the thunder in his outbursts, but also of much gentle rain of quiet pathos. Instead, the entire conception is enveloped in a chill mist of alienation. Typically, the great line, "Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality" managed to elicit laughs

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on both nights I attended. All that was needed was to avoid a pause at the semicolon. But no—the pause was stubbornly held. Or consider how "Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!" was reduced in size. Lear picked up his boots and manipulated them like a troop of horse shod with felt: they sneaked up on an imaginary insect colony, and then, on each dully muttered "kill," some invisible beetle was pettishly swatted. There were no verbal cataracts here, let alone emotional hurricanoes—though Goneril, conversely, was allowed to roll out her speeches in the grand style.

But let us not rob Peter to pay Paul: Scofield deserves as much blame as Brook. That Scofield is an actor of unusual stature would be senseless to deny, but he is an actor suspicious of poetry and a sworn enemy of passion—rather large handicaps for playing Lear. By the time I heard Scofield do his first scene in an elaborately artificial old man's voice complete with rustic overtones, saw him look stolid and move as in weighted, astronaut's boots, heard him equip his greyish utterances with little, ascending, crotchety curlicues at the end, my spirits began to sink. They went right on sinking as inner and outer storms began to rise, or, rather, fail to rise. True, there were affecting scenes with Alex McCowen's saucily sophisticated Fool; there was, later, a moving encounter with Gloucester and Edgar; and all the moments when Lear must impose desperate control on his emotions and sanity had the proper thwarted momentum.

But emotional control is not, after all, what the part calls for—at least not till the final sections of the play. And in Scofield there was never an unloosing of the ache, despair, fury which alone could purge and chasten that proud man, which alone can bridge the gap between maniac and saint. And what of the poetry, the one element of the play that does not crack or spill, that reaches the most painfully precarious heights of magnificence while at the same time fulfilling the pious, well-nigh humble, task of being the one luminous thing that reconciles us to the universal darkness? This indispensable poetry was wilfully cast out by Scofield and Brook, by readings that were clouded, arid, deliberately anti-poetic. The later scenes with Cordelia thus proved dismal anticlimaxes.

Oddly enough, there was, besides tendentious cutting, some uncouth manhandling of the text. So Scofield would change the famous "Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;/Robes and furr'd gowns hide all" to "great vices," for which he has the authority of the Folio, but not that of good sense. But neither Folio nor Quarto—nor even a duodecimo—explains his rewriting of the no less famous "let them anatomize Regan" as "atomize Regan," unless he was simply trying to fall in with the general atomizing process of the production. Again, John Laurie, as Gloucester, addressing the mad Lear, emended "O ruin'd piece of Nature! This great world/ Shall so wear out to naught" to "fall out to naught," which is nonsense.

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As for Brook's costumes, they were, for the most part, rather nice in their burlapy or leathery timelessness; his sets were a cross between Isamu Noguchi and Teo Otto: vaguely non-objective objects appearing out of nowhere and disappearing into it, or carried on stage and off. Sometimes they suggested known places and things, though not necessarily the appropriate ones: a railroad crossing is not a palace interior. Sometimes they were unknowable: three corrugated copper squares which could be suspended along walls or in mid-air, singly, doubly, or all together. In the storm scene, which was played in bright lights, with no heath, and with only the people straining and toiling against arbitrary gusts of wind which might strike one actor and not the other and come from opposite directions simultaneously, all three copper squares oscillated and buzzed like a cubist beehive. When just one square was lowered, I always expected it to bear a legend, say: "January 1636. Mother Courage loses her daughter and trudges on alone."

As for the supporting cast, it ranged from Irene Worth's heroic monolith of a Goneril, Ian Richardson's nonchalantly scintillating Edmund, and Alec McCowen's almost too intellectual Fool, through some adequate performances, all the way to Tom Fleming's obvious Kent, John Laurie's pathetically decrepit but otherwise boring Gloucester, Brian Murray's callow Edgar, to Clifford Rose's scurvy little Albany. The best moments of this production were stage images or stage business: Lear's knights conducting their tumultuous *dolce vita* at Goneril's court; the miserable, near-dead, half-naked Gloucester cowering stage-center, while a beautifully orchestrated but invisible battle majestically rages and wistfully dies away off-stage. But, typically, this is all peripheral, not to say adventitious; nothing that is germane to the text and inherent in the poetry was allowed to have anything like the same forcefulness and life. To liberate *King Lear* from the awesome splendor of its teeming poetry is not to bring it closer to our time, but to deprive it of that which now, as ever, is the one thing that can humanize its horror.

The other bill of the visitors was *The Comedy of Errors,* directed by Clifford Williams in an often inventive but rather haphazard fashion: there were moments of traditional farce, moments of stylized modernization, and interludes of *commedia dell'arte,* not exactly distracting, but hardly relevant or exhilarating. On the whole, it was Michael Williams, as a zestfully inept conjurer, who accounted for most of the merriment with some quite irresistible gags the director or he himself dreamed up; but there was also agreeable comic work from Ian Richardson and Alec McCowen as the Antipholi, and Barry MacGregor as the Dromio of the visiting team. Julie Christie was a very pretty Luciana, and Anthony Powell's costumes, along with the ladies' necklines, plunged us in pulchritude.

Frank D. Gilroy's first play, *Who'll Save the Plowboy?,* was a fine

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piece of realistic theatre that enjoyed an all too emphemeral *succès d'estime;* his new and much less interesting play, *The Subject Was Roses,* has recieved hysterically inordinate praise and seems to be slated for full-fledged success. Gilroy is an honest writer with a sure grip on dialogue, but much more than that is needed to make a good play. If there is a catalogue of clichés of the modern drama extant, it must surely include the following: the father who doesn't understand his son, the mother who gently bullies her darling boy, the mother who is more genteel and sensitive than her husband, the father whose crude toughness shelters a heart of untapped gold, the husband and wife who haven't slept with each other for God knows how long and whose implicit or explicit attempts to change this unpleasant state result in greater unpleasantness, the son who is torn between conflicting loyalties to warring parents—and so on, until you have covered every aspect of *The Subject Was Roses.* The sensitive son who wants to be a writer, the mother who regresses into a happier childhood, the father who is stingy and domineering, the atmosphere of booze and family brawls followed by fumbling, tongue-tied apologies have made their long journey into night, and should not be dragged back into the day.

The acting of Jack Albertson and Irene Dailey as the parents is passable, and Martin Sheen's son is a convex and engaging protrayal. Ulu Grosbard's staging is conscientious and convincing; and the author, as one perceives him in and behind the lines of this autobiographical jig (which includes even an extensive tribute to vaudeville, especially in its Hibernian manifestations) is amiable and lively. But a play built on homely platitudes, be they ever so sincere, remains flat as a pancake, and though there are no pancakes in the play, waffles figure prominently.

The English theatre has developed a brand of Absurdism of its own, more socially conscious, more concerned with quaint but real types, more prosaic than its French counterpart. In the plays of N. F. Simpson, Henry Livings, Ann Jellicoe, and a few others, the Absurd has been domesticated: it has been swathed in flannels and tweeds, a pipe has been stuck in its mouth, and it has even developed a taste for tea. Certainly the amount of tea consumed in Ann Jellicoe's *The Knack* compares favorably with the quantity ingested in a play by James Bridie, J. B. Priestley, or whoever the current West End favorite may be. But Miss Jellicoe strains her tea through some curiously barren, bizarrely monochromatic, almost basic-English dialogue, but an always slightly off-base basic.

She gives us three young men in a lodging house: one a sort of Soho satyr who measures out his life with petty seductions; the other a foolishly likable ninny, starved for women; the third an *homme moyen sensuel,* full of outrageous fancies but quite sensible underneath. The

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teddy-boy picks a little provincial guinea pig for the teddy bear to practice on under his sinister guidance. The nice chap tries to humanize the experiment. The guinea pig revolts. There are all kinds of crosscurrents, cross purposes, double crosses, and minor mayhem. Amiable decency seems, in the end, to assert itself.

Miss Jellicoe has said in an interview that "people should forget their intellect for a while and lead fuller and richer sensory and emotional lives," and *The Knack* certainly capitalizes on the most visceral aspects of conversation, so to speak, garnished by charmingly feminine flights of comic fancy. Her play is a kind of good-natured fat lady, naked but wearing a funny hat—a daintily comic cloche over a Gaston Lachaise body. Typically, the girl's dialogue for half a page or more consists of the word "Rape!" Simple but not ordinary: she is screaming about a rape that hasn't been committed, though she wishes it had; and calling for help which, however, she doesn't want to come. It is the victim raping the rapists, who are really rapists in spite of themselves. It is a topsy-turvy world, seen upside-down through an old-fashioned camera, but all the time we know that we will get from it a picture that is comfortingly right-side-up. I found *The Knack* amusing and endearing; Brian Bedford's performance as flawlessly tactful, gracefully understated a piece of comic work as I have ever seen; Roddy Maude-Roxby a bit too cabaretish but overwhelmingly droll; and the other two performers at least adequate. Mike Nichols's direction may insist on high gear even when the terrain is momentarily level, but it is full of beans and unencumbered by any of that intellectualizing that Miss Jellicoe so stoutly abhors.

An American lady-playwright who is also a pop artist and an ex-wrestler (good qualifications for absurdist drama) has come up with a kind of woman's version of *Oh Dad, Poor Dad;* I refer to Rosalyn Drexler's off-Broadway musical, *Home Movies,* which has all the slaphappily perverse, blueish, artfully anti-arty qualities which "home movies" nowadays suggest. There is no point in describing this farrago whose chief virtue is that it is indescribable: outrageous, incoherent, and, when not solidly boring, monstrously funny. The whole thing is really less a play than a hypertrophied play on words, and Al Carmines's music is sufficient to the evil thereof, as are the suitably grotesque staging and acting. *Home Movies* is a collage with *arrière-pensées,* and its inocuous wickedness is not without charm.

As we began with an Actors' Studio Theatre production, so let us end. (Another A.S.T. item, *Baby Want a Kiss,* is too sleazy to dwell on; suffice it to say that those who possess the key to this *pièce à clef* will find it even less appetizing than those who don't.) A.S.T. has finally come around to a good, indeed a great play, *The Three Sisters*—and what hath Strasberg wrought? For it is with intense curiosity that one awaited the appearance of Lee Strasberg as director be-

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fore the general public for the first time since his withdrawal to become the guru of the Actors' Studio, the Zen master and den mother of the Method.

The result is reverent and utterly stodgy. What is serious in Chekhov, emerges funereal; what is funny, comes out ludicrous; and what is sad, becomes dead. The play neither moves us nor moves along: in the gaping interstices of this production, a whole other one could be staged, faster and better. But the trouble is not so much lack of tempo as lack of humor, sensitivity, and imagination. Let us merely consider the cast.

As Masha, Kim Stanley is up to her tried and trying tricks: the long pause before speaking, the soft and slightly quavering delivery, the staring off into astral space, the lurking threat of hysterics. The actress is not only immense, she somehow suggests hollowness as well, and as she lounges about in scene after scene, one seems to be looking at a giant piece of *puri,* or whatever the round, inflated bread of India is called. No actress should allow herself to look so, and no director should permit her to appear so on his stage. Geraldine Page, as Olga, merely trundles out every one of her Tennessee Williams-heroine mannerisms, but without their former conviction. The most appalling moment comes when Olga declares that watching people being cruel makes her sick, and Miss Page promptly repairs to the washstand and starts retching. Shirley Knight's Irina is a hysterical wraith you expect to see take off for Moscow through the air. Luther Adler's Chebutykin is an itinerant bagel peddler, and Robert Loggia's Solyony is a silent-movie ham unable to decide whether he is Valentino or Barrymore, and sporting a voice which the silents, bless them, would have denied us.

James Olson's Tuzenbach is at least inoffensive, but excessively weak; Kevin McCarthy's Vershinin, a road-company Chocolate Soldier; Gerald Hiken's scholarly Andrei, straight lower East Side; Albert Paulsen's Kulygin is a burlesque straight man obliged to go on for the ailing comic, and managing merely to snivel earnestly. Most frightening of all is Barbara Baxley's Natalya, something just excaped from Vincent Price's laboratory, its voice, behavior, and appearance far from ready to start impersonating a human being. Even Salem Ludwig, as Ferapon—a gentle, touching old man of the Firs variety—must turn into a bewhiskered feeble-minded weight-lifter.

After this, you will want to spare me—and yourselves—further descriptions of *The Three Sisters,* though you might want to know that Randall Jarrell's otherwise colorless English version (based on what previous translation?) does rise to one ludicrous height when Chebutykin is made to pronounce himself "snug as a bug in a rug." Here lies the A.S.T.

R.I.P.

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VERNON YOUNG

The Italian Film: Left Hand, Right Hand

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ITALY TODAY is as neatly exemplified by Dino Risi's film, "The Easy Life," as by any recent export from Cinecitta. The original title is to the point: *Il Sorpasso* ("Overtaken on the Road"). For Italians—enough of them to confer on this breezy film the suggestion of a parable—have been overtaken, forever. Bruno, an extrovert of unbridled proportions, is at the wheel, with a musical horn, and he's out for mindless pleasure. Roberto, in the film a "shy" law student (not a conception to have taxed anyone's ingenuity), hearing the siren voice of the claxon, is seduced into accompanying Bruno on a 24-hour journey to Samarra. By turns frightened, confused, annoyed, envious and thrilled, Roberto—the unwilling passenger—is finally, by his own consent, sucked into the rage for acceleration—"*Drive faster*, Bruno!"—and, as a consequence, destroyed. The film is effective rather than definitive: its "implication" has no concealed nuances and can be swallowed whole without rumination. Taken strictly as a narrative it would have been even more effective if the fatal trajectory had not been broken for so long a social detour. As it is, the detour, revelatory but expendable, breaks the tension necessary to the last crescendo. Risi never quite regains his initial beat of premonition, the gathering sense of a pulsating joy-drive into disaster. When the disbelieved-in moment does arrive, it has the shattered rhythm of an anti-climax.

So it seemed to me. For reasons of another kind *Il Sorpasso* missed fire in Italy, if one of the more profitable films of last year can fairly be described as having missed fire! However, I presume that Risi had *tried* to point a grave object lesson, with enough skill to bring this off within the convention of tragi-comic suspense. In which case I don't know whether to assert that the Italian audience (at large) was 'way ahead of him or 'way behind him! On that audience, in any case, the pathos of *Roberto's* fate was lost, and with it what we must believe was the directive point of the film. Italians who thronged to see *Il Sorpasso,* again and again, didn't give a hang *what* happened to Roberto! *They loved Bruno*! Bruno is what every back-street and back-province Italian wants to be: a high-speed versatile egomaniac, always at the wheel and never at a loss, a cynosure at the ping-pong table, on the dance floor, in a speed boat and on a diving-board. Bruno is in fact a prototype, by way of Via Veneto, of what our old friend Sheldon once defined as the *somatotonic* which, as embodiment of a mass ideal.

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seems to outnumber and outlast all other envied categories of man in our time. And there is some justice in the mob's adulation of Bruno. He has vitality on his side, the kind that shows, and Roberto hasn't. Bruno, the film version, is equipped with the advertised weapons of success—an unending supply of adrenalin, histrionic talent, unanswerable comebacks, inexhaustible cash, and *women* on whom to spend it! We're over-familiar with him. Risi and his script-writers didn't invent him. But with the help of Vittorio Gassman, who played Bruno with untiring adroitness and something murderously close to fascination, they projected an irresistible variant at a strategic Italian moment, at the hour of Boom (relative, of course), at a day of reckoning with the inevitable affirmation mass Italy was bound to make, when given half a chance to become as badly civilised as the examples we have provided—and with malevolent resources of its own.

The sequel, on the business front, is relevant. Delighted with the outcry for Barabbas, the producers of *Il Sorpasso* promptly retained the scenarists, rehired the same leading actors (Gassman and Jean-Louis Trintignant) and secured the clumsy services of a director unknown to me (or to anyone, I think), Mauro Morassi. The sacrificial anecdote was again attempted under the title, *Il Successo*. Having no heart for it, the script-writers put their minds on it; Gassman worked twice as hard with a character half as plausible and not at all personable, and the result was a crudely packaged and fraudulent reprise, offering the bait of Gassman-as-Heel together with an unconvincing moral doom by which he is supposedly overtaken. For all I know this movie was as lucrative as its predecessor. Gassman has already been featured in two more films (one directed by Risi) that further obscure or denature whatever critical asperity had been originally intended by *Il Sorpasso*, while preserving without equivocation the ingratiating force of Bruno-More-or-Less. And I'm certain that many more of those melodic claxons have been sold in Italy in the last six months than ever before.

That commercial filmmakers should exploit as an emulative figure of fun the very character they had set up as a feigned object of their moral disapproval will shock none but the exaggeratedly naive. Such opportunism all but constitutes the history of the large-scale film industry. That Italy is unrivalled today in all the venal directions of film production and promotion will be news only to the out-of-touch who still equate The Italian Film with a handful of *neo-realismo* masterpieces and the unpopular art of Antonioni. Rome is the world's coproduction capital for an annual half-hundred of those costume brawls attributed, by remote euphemism, to "historical sources." Cinecitta has no competitor in the calculated dissemination of the perverse and the pornographic, whether ineptly camouflaged as anthropological field excursions (encouraged by *Mondo Cane,* I and II—'Nothing inhuman is alien to me') or offered without guile for what most of it is,

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barrelscrapings, internationally accumulated: "Forbidden Cities," "Forbidden Sex," "Neon Night Life," I and II—"Around the World in Ninety Nights," "The Nude Look by Night."

None the less, if we insist dreamily on taking the long, long view of *all* film production, in the belief that only the exceptional movie justifies the whole prodigiously vulgar undertaking, Italian films continue to engage our divided attention. After you've agreed that the Italian film-making scene displays all the idiotic and corrupt practises common to Hollywood, that scapegoat with the highest smell, you have yet to account for, or simply to rejoice in, the fact that whereas year after year nothing—*virtually nothing*—comes out of America or, for that matter, out of West Germany's thriving industry, Italy somehow breeds and maintains a De Sica, a Fellini, an Antonioni, a Monicelli, a De Seta, to say nothing of many others who perennially invite our confidence that "this time" they will fully recover the spirit of a past promise. (I think of, for example, Rossellini, Visconti, Lattuada, Zampa.)

This phenomenon is truly a cause for amazement, and it's the essential subject of my remarks here, which I want to illustrate by scanning the work of some Italian directors who have emerged as Names during the last five years. In their work there is especially noticeable the double burden which the Italian film director typically supports. (I have reference, naturally, to the typically worth-while director, not to the full-time merchants.) In addition to the supply-and-demand pressures that assail men of good intention anywhere, the Italian, with notable exceptions, takes a long time to trust himself. He is easily swerved from his personal power: by a pet actress whom he allows to distort his subject matter, by the reproaches of his friends, by political resentment (his own or that of the Press), by a seemingly authoritative style just created in Paris, by clamorous appeals to be more class-conscious or less, more Italian or more international. It's not the case that he doesn't let his left hand know what his right hand is doing (no political pun intended); he is only too aware of what *each* hand is doing, and tries obligingly to grow a *third* hand! He has the devil of a time trying to keep his eye on the *object*, which he's almost afraid to acknowledge unashamedly as the *art* of the film. (This is all implicit in Fellini's "8½" but for the present I think the subject of that film has been sufficiently adumbrated. I'm after less articulated examples of the predicament.) I've a strong feeling that the confusion is an extension of the Italian social scene. The artist's conditioned background in Italy operates against the ruthlessness of individual dedication: the family table, the gregarious street and café life, the plaza as forum, the stand-up *espresso* bar; these institutions and their like are basic to the *public* orientation of the Italian. They nourish his ego, they supply his texture of reference—and they frequently prolong his weaning. As a result (the film is again my illustration), you can never be quite

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sure, when faced with a catastrophic failure of judgement from a director you had built up respect for, if he has sold himself out or, regrettably, sold himself short, in an effort to appease someone or other, someone with an impressively loud voice, who has importuned him to betray what he can do best and instead do something else held to be more significant, fashionable or whatever.

When Damiano Damiani, for instance, entered film-making four years ago with two crime stories of authentic moral content, "The Lipstick" and "The Hired Killer," I thought of him as a welcome arrival who had not securely won a style to enhance his subject. If I were to judge him by his current film, alone—*La Noia* ("The Empty Canvas"), a travesty of Moravia's novel so complete that any debate over it would be futile—I'd say, rather, that it wasn't so much style as rudimentary taste and intelligence that was eluding him. *La Noia* is not only one of the most badly motivated films of the Italian year, it is one of the most poorly executed. Now, I don't *know* if Damiani was actually caught in the machine and was manoeuvered into making this film against his own wishes, or if he deluded *himself,* to some prodding, that the Moravia world of not-very-cinematic social rancor and masochism was just his *forte.* If a director makes the wrong choice of material for himself or has something unnegotiable (like Horst Buchholtz, especially) thrust upon him, I'm not too surprised if he loses many of his bearings. But I'm mystified when he seems totally to have forgotten, between one movie and the next, what a motion-picture camera is used for!

Mauro Bolognini inspired me with a misgiving almost as grave. With *Il Bell' Antonio* he seemed to have assimilated the French effects he had previously depended on to serve him not wisely and too heavily and made a film magnificently energetic, commanding and compassionate, rich with local accent and saturated with a kind of baroque anger. Successively he lost himself again, for the sake of decor or for that of the literary facsimile—in *La Viaccia, Senilitá, Agostino.* In the last-named you can see the whole art of film editing and structure falling apart in his hands, a spectacle the more astonishing by contrast with his recovery of the art in *La Corruzione,* released this year and quickly snubbed by the Italian press. I'd not strenuously contest the snubbing if I believed the special grounds for it justified the dismissal of the film's remaining merit. Italian critics evidently saw no further merit after they had sneered at Bolognini's adaptation of a subject throughly staked out by the French; since the treatment was manifestly derived from Fellini and Antonioni it was easier to include this in the sneer than to examine the film more closely.

A young man fresh from divinity school is prepared to turn his back on the affluent world he is heir to (his father is a successful publisher) before even testing its positive pleasures. His father (played by Alain Cuny with finely tempered cynicism) gives the boy a trial run of the worldly life, in the foreshortened course of which, and with the col-

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laboration of his father's mistress, the young vulnerable learns that for most people corruption is something they live comfortably with. The consequence of rejecting corruption, while remaining within sight and reach of its advantages, is tormented isolation. The film's ending—incidentally a *tour de force*—leaves the youth hesitating between retreat (into the Church?) and The World, mainly accounted for by his father's blandly manipulated environment and the Sin of having been seduced by the father's secretary. I've taken liberties with the summary but the issue is almost that glib and you'll need no over-editing from me to question many over-simplifications in this film. But if you can manage to take these aspects of the matter in your stride I think you'll be rewarded by some of the most sophisticated film style of the season. Certainly the Antonioni influence is prevalent, especially in the long central sequence on the publisher's yacht (the sinister islands, the spatial undertones of the music, the duration of the bold facial closeups). Must I point out that there *is* such a thing as fruitful borrowing? Bolognini makes these elements his own; they are reminiscent of another movie but you never doubt that you're in this one! Follow closely the suicide sequence at the publisher's office, characteristic of the film's flawed skill. The timing of the tragedy is awkwardly invoked; allow it poetic license, however, and you can appreciate the brilliance of the montage which follows (watch, from the moment father and son clink glasses, through to the agitated scene outside the building, shot from the inside staircase, when the publisher slaps his son away from the sight of the body). This is a model interlude of movie narration: how to achieve maximum tension with the fewest number of cuts . . . For Bolognini's inconsistent progress I have an undocumented explanation. I think that he feels he should disapprove of the rich on principle, and the rich are the chief begetters of that opulence which Bolognini has so marked a talent for recreating as cinematic atmosphere. The tension between his flair for decor and his moral attitude toward it is at the troubled source of his work. If he ever resolves his lover's quarrel in subjects as personal for him as he made *Il Bell' Antonio* he'll outfilm Fellini, with less expenditure of effort.

One tenth of Bolognini's art would be useful to Francesco Rosi who has become a darling of the Left and a nag to the fearful by the force of his singlemindedness alone. Rosi's subject has always been Combat, usually in a borderland where the working-class milieu and that of the racketeer overlap. More often than not his stories have been transcriptions of actuality, increasingly slanted toward an explicit political stand, as in *Salvatore Giuliano* and "Hands on the City." Indecision is not Rosi's problem. He knows what he's doing (i.e. politically) and I see no reason for doubting the sincerity of his commitment. I simply find all his films quickly forgettable because he hasn't the root of the film artist in him. An exponent of the political film more rewarding to follow (so far) is Carlo Lizzani. His background to some very crisp melodrama has been Fascism and War II (in "The Hunchback" and

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"Trial at Verona"); he has a weakness for compound plots and an excessive number of violent climaxes, which at least signifies his passion for making an indelible impression. How judiciously he can pursue that ambition within his present historical ambience remains to be seen. Florestano Vancini has a comparably puzzling future. His film, *La Banda Casaroli,* based on the brief pathetic career of three provincial bank robbers in 1950, is almost the classic Italian example of not knowing when you've sung it. Up to the point where two of the Casaroli boys are slaughtered in a car that won't start, in an empty piazza (as harrowing a climax as I can recall from any hoodlum film), Vancini was making the best action film of the year—better than that, he was creating at the same time a social study of Italian small-city *mores* which showed up all of Rosi's effort as even more cumbersome. Then came the recoil: twenty-minutes-worth of gratuitous vespers. It was like watching someone create a living creature and then, in a fit of revulsion, drive nails into the newly beating heart.

A few years ago when it was mandatory for someone in every country to try his hand at the anti-film film, Ugo Gregoretti and Pier Paolo Pasolini, each in his own synthetic way, did duty for Italy. Gregoretti's first film, "The New Angels," a form of *cinema verité* which had already been done better (but not a great deal better) by Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker and others in Paris, was quite as boring an imitation of a New Wave studio-joke as any I had seen from Poland, Denmark, Finland or Manhattan. It had *verve*, I suppose, but perhaps I wasn't in the mood for verve when its social inspiration was so patently imported. Last year Gregoretti reached farther, and as unavailingly, afield than Paris, but even with "The New Angels" to warn me I was quite unprepared for his paralyzingly uncomical essay at science-fiction, called "Omicron." The reason I mention Gregoretti at all is that I have since seen him in person (i.e. on Italian television) and all by himself he is an astonishingly funny man! I am left with the deduction that he is perhaps avoiding his single destined subject—out of modesty. As for Pasolini, a visitor from literature who has been too readily encouraged to believe that he's precisely what the motion picture has been waiting for, I am primarily astounded by the persistent opinion that he is profound as well as bizarre. Not only was I made uncomfortable by the affectations of his *Accatone,* I was repelled by his willful identification therein of the criminal, the poor, the Christian and the androgynous. What is good enough for Dostoievsky is not necessarily viable in Italian *"avantgarde"* film. This season Pasolini has reverted to the most orthodox neo-realism topic of the Forties (prostitute trying to conceal her profession from her son), at the same time retaining sundry "progressive" touches, consisting notably of disparities between the musical score employed and the scenes it accompanies (a trick stolen from the French and which he had utilized in the earlier film!) and much very questionable theological symbolism—certainly questionable as being *avant-garde! Mamma Roma* is the title of

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this embroilment and not all of Anna Magnani's undying resources can for long give credibility to its compulsively masochist treatment.

Mario Monicelli has earned popularity and respect without quite being regarded as an "important" director. None of his films has been either great or sensational. He hasn't made a comedy as profoundly artful as "Miracle in Milan" or "The White Sheik," nor as wildly amusing as "Divorce—Italian Style." He has simply discovered a fusion of social naturalism and wit and he's intelligent enough to let that suffice him until he's ready to give it greater scope. Each of his films is better than the one preceding, in a special way hard to define but probably summed up in the tone of his latest of full-length, *I Compagni* (U. S. title, "The Organizer"; he has contributed a single episode to "High Infidelity," which I haven't seen). In "The Organizer," as he did in *La Grande Guerra* four years ago, Monicelli recreates a milieu of our medium-distant past, a past far enough away to yield nostalgia, near enough to be a brutal reminder. And he recreates it as a *joke*—a lighthearted joke, not a wry one; he invests biting social realism with comic observation (it never appears to be invention) and he brings this off better than anyone I've seen attempt it. Moreover, he does this within the orthodox (not to say stale) framework of the classic Soviet strike film of the Twenties and early Thirties. All of the ingredients and most of the characters reappear for Monicelli's rehearsal of a Turin spinning-mill strike at the turn of the century: a "reasonable" leader pitted against a hotheaded one; a widow who carries on after her stalwart husband is killed in a fray; a prostitute of exemplary loyalty to the cause of the strikers (and of incredible beauty in the social context). Plotwise, in fact, Monicelli's principal point of variance from the model (cf. Piscator's "Revolt of the Fishermen," 1935) is his use of a Socialist professor as the brainy lever of the resistance.

If the clichés remain, at least nominally, why are they acceptable? Because they're conspicuous only in retrospect. Because in Monicelli's film (this is true of all his later work) every moment is *alive*. He has a feeling, above all, for scenic vivacity; even in the most restful or most conversational scene something is always flickering, moving, lighting up with expression. His timing is nearly perfect, his direction of little bits of human business is pertinently *incidental*, and he never permits a character, once established, to flatten out into a mere repetition of a key idiosyncrasy. Mastroianni's characterization of the Socialist, for which I assume we can give a degree of credit to Monicelli, is built on surprise motifs. Absent-minded and generally timorous, the professor is never wholly as ineffectual as he seems at such moments as when you discover him in bed with his mittens on. He's a dedicated man, not a sentimental one; he lives inside his own operational planning and his love is an idea, no matter how the workers may flatter themselves that they are the sole objects of his solicitation. Withal he is capable of lashing out violently, not from heroism so much as from irritation at being disturbed in his concentrations.

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The movie critics of the Italian press selected, as their three best Italian films of 1963, Fellini's "8½", Visconti's "The Leopard" and Rosi's "Hands on the City"—as craven a choice as you'd expect in any country at this level of estimation. There's probably no argument against the Fellini film, and the Cannes and Venice festival juries had ratified the other two for them. There's a double margin of safety here, since Visconti and Rosi are widely known as "Communists," and you never know when you might need a friend at court. I still have a rhetorical question. If period portraiture and "Leftist" sympathies were in truth an appealing combination, why not "The Organizer," a creative hour and a half of movie-making, rather than "The Leopard," which ran for well over two hours—and in which I don't remember, there was so much window-dressing, more than one cinematic idea? (The one is not vital enough to merit recapitulation.)

Beyond this (the critics' main choices), though I read avidly through all the supplementary mentions—best decor, best supporting actors and actresses, best special camera work (you know the routine) —I found no listing whatever of the single Italian film of the year I'll most want to see again five years from now, let's say, assuming it hasn't by then been buried forever. This is *La Mano sul Fucile* ("Hand on the Gun"), the first film of 28-year-old Luigi Turolla. None of my movie-going acquaintances in Rome had heard of the film when I discovered it on the third-time-around programs. The setting of Turolla's film, photographed by Carlo Bellero, is the high escarpment and glacial meadows of the Lombardy Alps in 1944. A Partisan group is trying to reach a designated clearing where a supply parachute will be dropped. A Fascist patrol is trying to stop them. Owing to the nature of the terrain—a vertical wilderness, above treeline, with sparse patches of melting snowfield—an open contest is impossible or suicidal. The men, on both sides, dig in, snipe when they can, reconnoitre stealthily, move swiftly at lethal risk under cover of dark or of a sudden flurry of mountain mist. On both sides they spend a long time waiting, a short ambushed moment dying.

As one explanation of the film's unenthusiastic reception, it was suggested to me that the civil aspect of Italy's war—when Italian openly fought Italian—is a relatively tender area for debate or drama. I beg to disbelieve, in view of the syndicated histories and biographies of the Fascist era which are constantly appearing in popular Italian magazines. I'm sure the reason is to be sought in the character of the film itself, not in its subject. Italian audiences can take internecine war movies, but not if these are as unadulterated as Turolla's. They love "Four Days in Naples," which is essentially *kitsch*. A host of lovable characters, including a small boy (taken from the real life-and-death situation), are labelled at the outset so that you know precisely which will be the ones you'll see die in generously heroic fashion. Furthermore the identity of friend and foe—Neapolitan and German, local insurgent and Fascist—is never in doubt. And the whole film proceeds

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in a scarcely relieved din of shooting, operatic screaming and the amplified musical score of Carlo Rustichelli.[1] Turolla made the mistake, from the audience viewpoint, of filming a political action without political emphasis. "Hand on the Gun" is a crisis situation, too late for political argument. In that last Alpine oubliette where two dozen men have become composite creatures—part man, part rifle, part rock-rooted bush—only survival has value, and the means to survival are details, most of which yield a limited degree of personality: a blurred shape seen through a telescopic sight (man or wind-shaken boulder?); the last cigarette, or less than half, dry-nursed on a cracked lip; the last cartridge, fondled between thumb and finger. In a superbly photographed rest period, the camera moves slowly from one man to another, hesitating at a face staring at the sky, at another talking softly, on hands clutching rifle barrels or toying with the distance mechanism, on a boot, or the inside of a discarded helmet. After a barely perceptible dissolve midway, Turolla slily moves us from the Partisan camp to that of the Fascists. Men are equalized by the terms of their existence, a comment also made at the end of the film with unprecedented sardonic inspiration; it is the more unprecedented in Italian film because it is made without a single word!

"Hand on the Gun" is too pure a film for the Italian audience to accept with reciprocity. I saw the film three times in outlying Rome cinemas and each time the Brunos of the audience were unable to control their boredom or impatience with Turolla's careful pace and dogged but poetic handling of his austere subject. It may be argued that the Italian audience does not entirely consist of Brunos. It does not—yet at any social or temperamental level a subtle film-watcher in Italy is rare. The sensibility of the Italian film- or theatre-goer has been opera-conditioned, if indeed it doesn't derive more directly from his social life where, equally, there appears to be no such thing as a significant silence or an unexplained cadence. Italians *hate silence;* in the theatre, as in life, something audible must be going on at every moment —if not action, then talk—which is why they are baffled by Antonioni in Italy, no matter what other rationalizations they produce; and this is why, after two years, a minority of them is just beginning to appreciate De Seta's film, "The Bandits of Orgosolo," acclaimed everywhere else in Europe. In short, the average Italian knows so little how to *look at* a movie, it must be counted as a miracle that a handful of Italians know how to *make* movies!

[1] The substitution of musically-aroused for film-created emotion is still the besetting vice of Italian moviemaking. Rustichelli, as facile a hack as an Elizabethan balladmonger, is the favorite of Italian directors who have only half done their job *on film.* No doubt he is also imposed on directors who don't need him or can use him in moderation. Rustichelli scored both *I Compagni* and *La Mano sul Fucile.* Monicelli knows best how to exploit him, Turolla knows how to control him. I suspect that if Turolla had had the authority of experience in the industry he would have curtailed the music track more drastically. Rustichelli's hurdy-gurdy theme is the only instance of excess statement in Turolla's film.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

GLENN GOULD'S TWO LECTURES IN THE HUNTER COLLEGE PIANO SERIES last winter revealed him as, in some ways, a Canadian counterpart of Donald Tovey, but one who differed from Tovey in other important ways. From his enormous knowledge of particular pieces of music Tovey derived general ideas about the operation of each composer, the changes produced in a form by successive composers, and so on; but with his interest in these general ideas he retained his interest in the particular works not merely as the sources, the examples of the general ideas, but as entities to be experienced in and for themselves. His writing for the public, then, included discussions of a composer's practice in his use of this or that musical form, as in the essays on Schubert and Haydn in *The Main Stream of Music;* but it consisted largely of the descriptions in *Essays in Musical Analysis* of the courses of events in particular works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert that treated each work as something to experience by and for itself, without regard for anything outside itself, and guided the listener in this experience of what gave each unique object its effect. And whether he quoted in musical notation the details he referred to in a description of the course of events in a particular work, or whether, as in the essay on Schubert, he merely referred to what in particular works illustrated his general statement, leaving it to the reader to look it up in the printed scores, Tovey made possible for the reader the correlation of statement with the music it refers to that is essential for the statement to be meaningful and understandable to the reader.

Gould too, at his lectures, spoke out of an awesome knowledge of particular works of all periods; and what he spoke about was certain of the general ideas he had derived from this knowledge—ideas concerned with the effect on sonata form of the changes in its harmonic structural basis. But as against those who, like E. M. Forster, are interested primarily in the particular work of art considered as an entity and experienced as such for the internal life that is perceived in it, and only secondarily in this work of art as a fact in the history of technique, style and form—as against those, Gould turned out to be interested primarily in the history of technique, style and form, and—when he concerned himself with a particular work—to be concerned with its technical, stylistic and formal procedures, not with the music they produced. Some of Bach's keyboard works, considered simply as pieces of music to listen to, are deadly dull; but for Gould their technical, stylistic and formal characteristics made them fascinating. I had wondered, a few years ago, what had led him to waste on Strauss's *Burleske* the

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marvelous gifts his Philharmonic audiences would have preferred to have him devote to a concerto of Mozart; and at his second Hunter College lecture I learned what the reason had been: Strauss's fascinating play with ambiguity of tonality. And at this lecture—in a piano performance of the orchestral writing that was an amazing tour de force—Gould demonstrated the remarkable subtleties of tonality in the exposition of the first movement of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony, clearly oblivious to the other Brucknerian characteristics of the musical progression that in another minute would have had me fleeing from the hall.

Nor was this all. Lecturing on the harmonic structural basis of sonata form, and coming to the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 109, Gould characterized the opening statement—playing its essential harmonies as a succession of chords—as a chorale, adding that the figuration was not important. The statement *would* be a chorale if Beethoven had written the series of chords; but instead he wrote the figuration, which *is* important in that it defines the musical idea which Beethoven is concerned with and develops; and the harmonies are only a means by which he develops it. Moreover, when discussing the second movement of the sonata, Gould referred to the left hand's first four bars as the theme of the movement. It is true that this left-hand bass is marked *ben marcato,* and that a page and a half later it is discussed by the right hand; which means that it does constitute an important musical idea in the movement. But at the beginning of the movement it is less important than the right hand's melodic statement, which is clearly the initial idea, the subject or theme, of the movement —clearly from the fact that the train of thought it initiates continues for twenty-four bars, whereas the bass ends after eight.

What these instances demonstrated was that Gould carried his interest in the structural harmonic element of the music to the point of regarding it as primary and as more important than the thematic melodic element. This attitude had been evident in some of his recent recorded performances—notably the one of Mozart's Concerto K.491, in which Gould had not been content merely to bring out a harmonically significant bass below the progression of melody, but in some instances had emphasized the bass to the point where it obscured the melody, and in other instances had obscured the melody with a bass line or figuration that had no significance at all. And an attitude which produced these flaws in a performance without precedent or equal was something to worry about.

Another thing to worry about is Gould's apparent increasing disinclination to play music in public and his preference for writing and talking about it. The audience that filled the hall at his first lecture was there because of its experiences of his power to illuminate music with his playing; but most of that audience did not find his statements at the lecture illuminating because these statements—representing

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his knowledge of the music they referred to—did not connect in the minds of his hearers with the similar knowledge of the music needed to make the statements meaningful to them, and because Gould did not sufficiently provide them with this knowledge by playing the music on the piano. As a lecturer, moreover, he presented highly abstract ideas in the highly idiosyncratic polysyllabic vocabulary and involved prose style that are difficult enough to understand even when printed on the record envelope and were even more obscure when spoken. I am not generalizing from my own experience but judging by the behavior of the audience at the first lecture—its increasing restlessness and the many departures. Nor did the prolonged applause of the smaller audience at the end of the second lecture—which Gould had to come out and acknowledge several times—mean that it had understood more. He had concluded this time with a marvelously beautiful performance on the piano of Alban Berg's Sonata; and the audience undoubtedly applauded in appreciation of the powers revealed in this performance. And I think it was moved, in addition, by the extraordinary knowledge, the intense dedication and the personal attractiveness Gould had exhibited in the lecture it hadn't understood much of.

I should add that in a radio talk on Schönberg Gould again was concerned with Schönberg's simplification of the musical language that had reached an extreme of chromaticism, and proceeded as though in showing that Schönberg's language was a simplification of what preceded it he had shown that it was as meaningful as what preceded it, and that the works in which Schönberg used it were as attractive, interesting and moving as those written in the earlier language—ignoring the real difficulty for most listeners, which was that Schönberg's language was not meaningful and the pieces of music in which it was used not only struck the ear as ugly but made no coherent musical sense. And in an article on Strauss in the *Saturday Review* Gould, writing as though the case made against Strauss had been concerned with his lack of an advanced technique and style, cited against this "'the harmonic sense . . . absolutely unique within the annals of tonality," the unsurpassed "ear for the centrifugal implications of the tonal cadence," that enabled Strauss to erect "the chromatic language of late-Romantic tonality . . . upon a more stable keel than that which Bruckner or Wagner laid"—i.e. upon the bass lines treated "as though they were magnetized to the tonal foundation"—and contended that the powers and the operation continued, increasing in subtlety, throughout Strauss's career. But the real case against Strauss is concerned with the quality of his musical ideas—the deterioration of this quality after *Don Juan, Till Eulenspiegel* and *Don Quixote,* not only in the subsequent tone poems but in the operas from *Salome* on, at the same time as the unique harmonic sense continued to produce the marvels of tonal manipulation which Gould's fascinated attention is concentrated on.

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Marilyn Horne, whose remarkable singing was the sensation of the American Opera Society's performance of Rossini's *Semiramide,* later gave a recital of her own at which she sang arias by Handel, *"Naqui all' afanno"* from Rossini's *La Cenerentola,* and groups of songs by Wolf, Hindemith and Nin. It took her voice some time to warm up; and in the songs of Wolf she didn't operate with the absolute sureness and rightness of pace and inflection of her singing of the Rossini aria; but even in this aria the beautiful voice and impressive style were not as overwhelming as they had been in the performance of *Semiramide.* She may actually have been in less good form that evening; but I am inclined to believe I was hearing the difference between the sound of her singing in Carnegie Hall, where *Semiramide* was performed, and its sound in Philharmonic Hall, where she made the mistake of giving her recital.

Undoubtedly she would have been better off in the small auditorium of Hunter College Playhouse, whose stage and pit were too small for the performance of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* that was put on by the Mannes College Opera Workshop. Janáček's method is to set the words in a recitative-like arioso that now and then leads into a phrase or two of formal melody, over a continuous flow of orchestral comment in an idiom which takes off from Dvořák's and Smetana's but is made modern, powerful and individual by dissonance. Though the orchestral writing was not realized adequately by the small group of players conducted by Carl Bamberger, one could hear that it was skillful and at times lovely; on the other hand the singers were good enough to give one a dependable idea of the phrases of music they were singing, and their diction good enough for the English words to be heard all too clearly; hence, though I concede the possibility of a different impression from a professional performance, I think I may trust my impression from the Mannes College performance—that the text of this philosophical fantasy falls far short of what was aimed at, and the music it is set to doesn't carry it any further toward that objective.

A report on the New York City Ballet's spring season must begin with the New York State Theater, in which the company gave its performances and probably will continue to give them beyond the two years of its present commitment. Whereas the newspaper reviews had reported the defective sound in Philharmonic Hall after the very first concert there and had continued to report it thereafter, the reviews of the New York City Ballet season were enthusiastic about the new theater and continued so in the face of dissent and protest from the public. And under the title *The Essence of a Theater, Newsweek* published one of those news-magazine-style pieces in which what is reported omnisciently as fact includes opinion—often, as in this instance, favorable opinion which accepts publicized intention as valid and as realized in what was achieved. The "essence" of the title turned

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out to be one defined by a statement of the theater's architect, Philip Johnson: "The essence of a theater is elegance, just as the essence of a church is spirituality"; and the piece reported in this connection that the "seats are deep red plush, the fronts of the rings [balconies] are gold leaf; the lights . . . are cut and faceted like giant diamonds"; that "the theme of elegance reaches a peak in the 50-foot-high, 200-foot-long promenade" of which "the travertine floor is inlaid with strips of red marble, the ceiling is gold leaf, the railings of the promenade balconies are travertine and bronze filigree, etc. etc." And as the piece accepted Mr. Johnson's view of all this as "the essence of a theater," so, when it considered the real essence of the new theater—namely, how it served the purposes and needs of performers and spectators—it again accepted his view that "a horseshoe . . . shape is best fitted for the stage and the people looking at it—with its curved corners, it brings you in close to the performers," and that with the five horseshoe-shaped balconies which brought 2,178 of the 2,729 seats within 100 feet of the stage he had achieved "the first modern *Volkstheater,* a theater of the masses . . . a non-aristocratic, large house," and thus had fulfilled the intention expressed in his quoted statement to Balanchine, "George, I designed it for you": a theater suitable for ballet to be performed in and to be seen in.

The quoted statement of Balanchine, "Just what I always wanted," may well have expressed his satisfaction with the new theater as a place in which to rehearse and perform his ballets; though even here one wonders whether he liked everything—in particular the diminishing effect on some of the ballets of the enormously increased height of the proscenium, or the fact that, with the increased width of the stage, dancers making an exit at the end of part of the Theme in *The Four Temperaments* found themselves with some distance still to go when the music had ended. And one wonders whether the statement represented satisfaction also with the new theater as a place in which to see his ballets: after a week or so I no longer saw him occupying his own seat in the first row center of the first balcony. For myself I can report that on the one occasion when I sat in the first row center of the first balcony I was still too far from the stage to be able to see the dancers' faces distinctly; and from the third, fourth, fifth and sixth rows in which I sat the other times the dancers were tiny figures—made to seem even smaller by the high proscenium frame of the stage space—of whom not only the subtleties of personal style were lost, but even the large movements were diminished to the point of ineffectiveness, and what at closer range would have been the thrilling trajectory of a soaring leap was reduced to miniature in size and impact. I felt myself to be not in contact with the dancers; and an actor who sat with me at one performance commented: "No emanations."

This was the "epic intimacy" referred to in the *Newsweek* piece as I experienced it in the center of the first balcony. And someone who had

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paid $4.95 for a seat on the side of this balcony reported that the horseshoe shape which brought him close to the dancers prevented his seeing them on part of that side of the stage, precisely as it did in the Metropolitan Opera House, whose notorious "blind" seats one would have thought would have kept anyone from repeating the error of its horseshoe shape today. Moreover, the difficulty of seeing increased with each successively higher balcony, as I learned from someone accustomed to seeing the company's performances from the second balcony of City Center, who reported the frustrating experience of seeing them from the similarly priced but much more distant fourth balcony of the New York State Theater. What, then, in Mr. Johnson's words was a theater for the seeing of ballet by the masses, in fact was one in which the performances could be seen satisfactorily by the occupants of the several hundred seats in the orchestra from, say, row H (center) to row P, but not by the occupants of the rest of the 1044 orchestra seats that were too close or too much on the side or too distant, and not by the occupants of the 1685 seats in the five balconies. His real concern had been with a theater to look *at,* not to see *in*; and that was what he had produced.

Reporting, then, on what I saw with less than full adequacy, I begin with Balanchine's new work for the season, *Clarinade.* It got its title from the music, Morton Gould's *Derivations* for clarinet and jazz band, an even worse Gould piece than the one Jerome Robbins used for *Interplay*; and what Balanchine devised for it, though not one of his great works, impressed me as better in its genre than the analogous Robbins invention in *Interplay,* with the blues movement bringing the amazing new ingenuities that each new supported adagio elicits from Balanchine. This movement was danced beautifully by Suzanne Farrell and Anthony Blum; and Gloria Govrin and Arthur Mitchell were excellent in the fast movements.

The season's other novelty was the company's first performance of Antony Tudor's *Dim Luster,* originally produced some twenty years ago by Ballet Theater. Somewhere around that time Carl Van Vechten remarked to me: "The trouble with Balanchine as a choreographer is that he isn't going anywhere. Tudor is going somewhere." And a few years later, after Ballet Society's production of Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments,* Mr. Van Vechten said he had liked only the Phlegmatic Variation. Last May Mr. Van Vechten was present for the New York City Ballet's first performance of *Dim Luster,* which was preceded by a performance of *The Four Temperaments*; and I wondered whether this time—watching in the Balanchine piece the succession of astoundingly original and powerful details in the three parts of the Theme—he had again failed to see the gigantic step they constituted in the going somewhere of Balanchine that still had not stopped. And after *Dim Luster* I wondered whether Mr. Van Vechten had seen this time that in the choreography of this piece Tudor had not gone an

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inch beyond the three movements of *Lilac Garden* that were his total dance vocabulary; and that his going in the new piece was merely to a new story line presenting the characters in new names (the Gentleman with Her, the Lady with Him), new costumes and a new set, but particularizing the old emotional frustration and nostalgia in the terms of the same vocabulary of gesture and mime. I am not objecting to the addition of a Tudor ballet to the company's repertory, but to the addition of a poor one: the company should have revived *Lilac Garden,* in which Tudor's use of his style was freshly motivated, not a work in which it was the repetition of mannerisms. In fact I think the company has reached the point where it ought to enrich its repertory with the outstanding works of other choreographers besides Tudor: not only the Lew Christensen-Virgil Thomson *Filling Station* again, but the Eugene Loring-Aaron Copland *Billy the Kid,* the Agnes de Mille-Copland *Rodeo,* the de Mille-Respighi *Three Virgins and a Devil.* And I go so far as to suggest the historic Fokine-Stravinsky *Petrushka* (with Lazovsky), and even the historic Fokine-Chopin *Les Sylphides.*

In addition to waltzing gracefully to Strauss's *Burleske* in *Dim Luster,* Edward Villella and Patricia McBride made impressively effective appearances in *Raymonda Variations* and the Tchaikovsky *Pas de Deux*—except that in the second piece she seemed to me not yet to have achieved transcendant mastery of her solo. In *Apollo* too her solo still exhibited conscientious effort instead of relaxed ease; but her work in the rest of the ballet was lovely. Suki Schorer repeated her beautifully achieved Calliope; Carol Sumner this time executed Polyhymnia's solo with assured mastery; and Villella's Apollo again had its touching warmth and expressiveness at the beginning, its ennobling grace and beauty later (it continued its one inaccuracy: Apollo's failure, in the *pas d' action,* to join the three muses in swinging their arms forward and backward. Villella had done this correctly at his first performance, but not thereafter).

In the continued absence not only of Violette Verdy and Allegra Kent but of Melissa Hayden, the younger dancers appeared in additional first-line roles. Most impressive in her suppleness and clarity was Farrell as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Terpsichore in the *Apollo* with d'Amboise, and in the Pas de Deux of *Agon.* Gloria Govrin exhibited her strong clarity in the final Ricercare of *Episodes,* and was effective in her solo, but a little big for her partners to lift easily, in the Second Pas de Trois of *Agon;* and Anthony Blum was excellent in the First Pas de Trois. Patricia Neary did well in the first movement of *Symphony in C;* and a new soloist, Marnee Morris, proved fully adequate to the demands of the last movement. On the other hand, after performances last fall and winter that were at times painful to watch, I was unprepared to see Maria Tallchief, in *Serenade,* operating again with her former security and ease and lovely fluidity.

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IAN HAMILTON

Letter From England

THE TWO MOST NOTEWORTHY EVENTS SO FAR in this English poetical year could hardly seem more blankly antithetical; in February Philip Larkin's *The Whitsun Weddings* and in March William Carlos Williams' *Pictures from Breughel,* a compilation that includes *The Desert Music* and *Journey to Love*. It has been tempting to read the coincidence of these two volumes as yet another emblem of the notorious English trek from the responsibilities of modernism, to closet Larkin in his role of morbidly provincial stanza-maker, the great deliverer of our cruelly interrupted Georgian tradition, and to over-celebrate Williams as the arch-victim of such insular timidity. But this has not happened, nor would it have been deserved.

Certainly Williams has been energetically ignored over here (just before his publication *The New Statesman* warned that American really was a foreign language) and it is appalling that his appearance has had to await what his publishers diagnose as "climate of opinion favourable to him." The ground was well prepared by Donald Hall's Penguin *Contemporary American Poetry* with its attempt to register the victory of Williams' "colloquial line" over what he called the American "academic orthocoxy," and there has been as much guilt as suspicion in the mild, defensive reviews that *Pictures from Breughel* has received; it is unlikely though that Williams will excite any grand re-appraisals. What is more probable is that his kind of self-conscious technical experimentation, particularly now that it is being set alongside the gnomic theorising of the Black Mountain poets, will be written off either as historical or just American. A more fertile lead might seem to be offered by what has been seen over here of the Sixties Press poets; James Wright's *The Branch Will Not Break* came out late last year and has aroused some real curiosity. There is much in it that is thinly whimsical and just inconsequential, and its influences are sometimes worn too boldly, but individual poems like *Lying in a Hammock* or *Eisenhower's Visit to Franco* instance exactly the kind of direct lyrical engagement with experience that is so rarely attempted here with our continuing glut of knock-me-down message poems.

It is however just this kind of directness that is beginning to break through in Philip Larkin's work. His new book represents a real advance on *The Less Deceived;* he has extended the range of his concerns, intensified his language and largely abandoned the grumpy and rather modish *persona* of his first volume. Larkin's subject is the vacuity of his personal life, its missed opportunities, its suicidal caginess, and his problem has always been to find a way of exposing this with-

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out foundering into valetudinarian desiccation. The offhand, debunking stance was designed to keep this danger at bay, but too often it had the effect of blurring his personal predicament into just a generalised sneer at Emotion, setting it beside God and Art as just another way of being phoney or deluded. Often he deliberately pressed his *persona* into an arrogant pose which could seem to celebrate the impoverishment which he was in fact complaining of, to flaunt it as a final measure of undeception. In doing so, however, Larkin usually allowed the poet to reserve judgement; thus in *Church Going*, it is the *poet* who recognises that "a serious house on serious earth it is" and who reprimands the irreverent *persona* of the early stanzas.

If Larkin seemed to get it both ways in his first book, this is only rarely the case with *The Whitsun Weddings*; he now discovers objective situations which can vitalise his gloom and encourage his compassion. His ability to sustain a complex reflection without either rigging his syntax or selling out to the demands of his elegant forms is even more sharply admirable now that reflection is seen to operate within experience and not merely to summarise it. The book's overshadowing character is Mr. Bleaney, whose furnished room the poet inherits; the detail is picked out unerringly, the flowered curtains, the sixty watt bulb, the saucer-souvenir, the football pools and so on—the materials of a wasted, loveless life. Bleaney's fate, that he can be measured by his paraphernalia, that he had "no more to show/Than one hired box" is hardly preferable to Larkin's alternative hell, that of "everyone making love and going shares," a live cheated by too much faith in "that much-mentioned brilliance, love"; but these are the two depressing poles, a seedy isolation or the eroding drudgery of marriage and kids.

Beyond these, there is love as "an enormous yes," a final balm, and intimations of it are always breaking in on Larkin's deadlock; this is a strength of the book, that he does not simply curl up with his antitheses as he used to. The pattern is irritated time and again by moments of direct lyrical excitement, by the arresting pathos of "new, slightly outmoded shoes" as well as by the fugitive calm of "wheat's restless silence." The closing lines of the title poem are a moving concentration of all that is ambitious and despairing in this fine collection. The wedding couples are about to arrive in London:

> and it was nearly done, this frail
> Travelling coincidence; and what it held
> Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
> That being changed can give. We slowed again,
> And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
> A sense of falling, like an arrow shower
> Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

Now that Larkin has moved beyond the Movement, it is likely that he will no longer need to pose; his worst enemies have always been his

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most vocal supporters and imitators. Though it is thankfully no longer possible nowadays to raise an instant chuckle at the expense of filthy Mozart, one can still come across obvious relics of the self-deprecatory fashion. The devoutly Larkinesque poet is instantly recognisable, for instance. He is usually to be found in railway trains and as he packs his prose into three ill-fitting stanzas, he will be seen to (a) denote an arbitrary sequence of "views" as observed from his carriage window, ideally a neat blend of the urban and pastoral, (b) detail and rather scornfully inflate the attractions of a pneumatic girl sitting opposite and eating cheese and tomato sandwiches/reading a novellette/fingering her cheap jewellery (c) think about either his wife or his lack of a wife, (d) return to the "views" as observed from his carriage window, these being now completely urban and coloured by his social inadequacy/his oppressive sense of responsibility/his impotence, (e) punchline the whole experience with a couplet embodying the notion, "that's how things *really* are."

"We all hate home and having to be there," wrote Larkin in one of his most celebrated poems; certain of his more revisionist disciples were for a time to be found in the nursery and it seemed that an assertion of the domestic verities was to be the natural consequence of fifty-ish insularity. The fecund David Holbrook gave a meaty edge to the proprieties of poets like Anthony Thwaite and the whooping cough poem threatened to become as standard as the one about a dead bird. Such contentment, however, could only turn sour and in the last year or so a new fashion has emerged which is superficially influenced by the muscularities of Ted Hughes. Hughes's strength, of course, is that he can write about animals with a taut, respectful accuracy; he does not caricature nor prettify their experience but by sheer force of resonant detail makes it seem magnificent. His weakness if that he is apt to set up crude comparisons between the marvellous instincts of the beast and the pimply hesitations of the human, and thus to imply an ethos of mere brawn. When his attention is distracted from the particular animal, Hughes's language is likely to flag into the prosy or be hotted up into the frankly rhetorical, and the uncertainty of motive which is apparent in his latest book, *The Earth Owl and Other Moon People* (it is at once too adult for children and too childish for adults) seems to suggest that he is facing a difficult time; the bestiary is complete and there is surely a limit to the number of moon-creatures he can invent before triviality sets in.

Much of the book's fun derives from his treating a metaphor in literal terms or building a fantasy on some minor visual coincidence; pimples literally grow heads and sing, cabbages are the mouths of gossiping women, dog-daises are organised into packs to hunt down sowthistles and so on. Technically, Hughes is relaxed to the point of real slovenliness; his lines spread into arbitrary lengths before colliding with enormous rhymes and the effect is often as feeble as this:

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They are sociable to begin with, showing each other their
long fangs and their no fears
They pretend it is all a good game and nothing to do with
death and its introductory tears.

If Hughes seems to have vulgarised his commitment to the violent occasion, what does one make of his descendants, the very fashionable poets who belong to what is known as The Group? The Group poets are strenuous in their denial of any common purposes other than the most vague and obvious ones—they are, they claim, just poetry lovers who get fun and wisdom from meeting every now and then to discuss their work. These seminars, which have to be overheard to be believed, have been broadcast by the BBC and a snatch from one of them is printed as an appendix to *A Group Anthology*—they offer a curious muddle of pedantry and chat and most depressing is the pious self-regard that underlies them; in spite of all his general disclaimers, Edward Lucie-Smith really means it when he says "The Group, I suppose, could be regarded as being in one way the heir to the Rhymer's Club or to Pound's sessions at the Cafe Royal"—a fairly weighty boast for a movement that will own to no direction.

In fact, though, there is much that these poets share beyond a fancy for the dramatic monologue—most obviously their pre-occupation with cruelty and physical ugliness; we live in violent times, they seem to have decided, and the poet's job is to assemble the evidence. Such documentary zeal can make whole poems out of, say, the rotten teeth in one's head, the swarming bugs in one's cellar, the day one sat drowning ants in vermouth, all the minuscule bestialities which flesh is the delighted heir to; it can also permit gloating recreations of concentration camp horrors ("I have six million foulnesses of breath," muses Peter Porter as he cleans his teeth) and apocalyptic inventions of the Day the Bomb Falls. The feeling throughout is that more glee than horror is at the back of this enterprise, that warts are being worn this year.

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Reviews

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Poetry Chronicle

FIRST, SOME INCIDENTAL OBSERVATIONS of a chronicle sort. There is now available a short movie about Theodore Roethke, *In a Dark Time,* made a few months before his death last year. It is the best such film I have seen; that is to say, though like all these films it is less than pleasing technically, it does manage to give a good sense of the poet. Instead of interviewing him, the film-makers have left him alone to be watched and to be heard reciting some of his poetry.[1]

Randall Jarrell has recently published a children's story called *The Bat-Poet.*[2] The four children (ranging in ages from five to twelve) I know who have read it or had it read to them have all enjoyed it, and parents have enjoyed it at least as much. Since I have grown up, I cannot recall having read for the first time any children's book which I have enjoyed more. And it tells more about the special oddness of poets than you would believe possible within such limitations.

William Cole has made an anthology of *Erotic Poetry*[3] which is excellent of its kind. It is comprehensive; it includes all the appropriate pieces I can think of and a good many I never had come across before; it is agreeable to dip around in, and is arranged sensibly. Unfortunately, it invites comparison with Walter de la Mare's 1946 anthology *Love,* my favorite book by the best of anthologists. De la Mare's is superior for one main reason: love poetry in English is a great deal better than erotic poetry. The raptures of the flesh and of its ancillary emotions are simply less amenable to various and superb writing than the raptures of the soul and its emotions. Not that there is no overlap, of course, but it is about the same as now obtains between "sex" and "love". Everybody was better off before the disjunction between the two was made; but now that it is made, comparing these two collections makes clear how much more important, for poetry, love has always been than sex.

Horace Gregory's *Collected Poems*[4] contains the revised and finished

[1] The film is available for rent or purchase from Contemporary Films, 267 W. 25 St., New York, N. Y.

[2] THE BAT-POET, by *Randall Jarrell.* Pictures by *Maurice Sendak.* Macmillan. $2.75.

[3] EROTIC POETRY, edited by *William Cole.* Random House. $8.95.

[4] COLLECTED POEMS, by *Horace Gregory.* Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $5.

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versions of his six volumes of poetry. You should know the book is there, and if you are concerned about poetry at all, you should read it and make up your own mind about the poems, if you have not done so already. However, I shall do no more than mention the book here, for it seems to me impertinent to make the sort of summary comment forced upon one by a poetry chronicle, about the life-work of so serious and substantial a poet.

The Contemporary Poet as Artist and Critic[5] is more interesting than its portentous title might lead you to suspect. This is a collection of eight symposia, brought about by Anthony Ostroff; in each of them, three poets comment on a poem by a fourth poet, who then comments on their comments. Read consecutively, these symposia are considerably more interesting than any one of them read by itself. Nothing very important comes out of the book, but it does serve as a lively demonstration of the similarities (to an outsider) and diversities (to an insider) of the way poets talk about each others' poems. Shapiro plays the Roaring Boy. Auden and Spender have a tiff. There are a few extremely ornate politenesses and a good deal of free associating on the meanings of passages from the poems. Snodgrass actually *says* something, which everybody else tacitly agreed not to do. All in all, it is worth reading.

Blurbing is as virulent as ever this quarter. Things have now reached such a pass that for not one of these books is the publisher's anonymous copy as inflated as most of the praise quoted from well-known writers. Elizabeth Drew: "Gregory's emotional range is perhaps the most comprehensive among modern poets." J. C. Ransom on Milton Kessler: "This is an original poet of great power and a highly tragic, sometimes despairing, tone." T. Roethke on Trypanis: " . . . a poet close to greatness at times . . . the master of what I call the plain style in the English language." R. Graves: "Derek Walcott handles English with a closer understanding of its inner magic than most (if not any) of his English-born contemporaries." Brendan Gill, the puffiest of many on Stevie Smith: "Uttering images of joy and terror as readily as the rest of us draw breath, Miss Smith marches down the decades immortally fresh and contrary. . . ." What are the poets trying to do, put the honest copywriters out of business? Or are they engaged in a competition to see which is the softest touch? I nominate for honorable loser Josephine Miles; her entire blurb for James Schevill's *Selected Poems: 1945 - 1959* reads: "I like Schevill's poems."

1964 may be remembered in literary history as the year in which Drama, Fiction, and Poetry all three made big entries in the midcentury sweepstakes to see which American writer could turn out the worst confession or pseudo-confession. Miller's *After The Fall* clearly is the most embarrassing. Mailer's *An American Dream* is way and

[5] THE CONTEMPORARY POET AS ARTIST AND CRITIC, edited by *Anthony Ostroff*. Little, Brown. $5.

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above the worst written; indeed, about its only interest, apart from the hoopla surrounding its publication, is to demonstrate just how badly a gifted writer can write when he puts his mind to it. Shapiro's *The Bourgeois Poet* is the most noxious; it aims at being genuinely nihilistic, but noxious is about what it accomplishes. My own emotions about these books have not quieted down enough yet for me to cast my vote for which is worst; my present impression is that, in poetry, Shapiro has no serious contenders.

1964 may also be worth a footnote as the year in which at least two of the long-soiled little words were finally redeemed for poetic use. In "Hypocrite Women" Denise Levertov uses "cunt" and in the 46th Dream Song John Berryman uses "fuck," and in both cases the words are where they are only because no other words would suit the poetic occasion. One word is used to refer to a thing, the other to an act, quite without regard for extraneous attitudes towards the words themselves. The long puritanism of words is now so feeble that a poet may, if he wishes, no longer concern himself with the fact that it ever was virulent.

Now, a generalization about the State of Poetry in the Present Quarter: it is thriving splendidly.

Any quarter must be counted a rich one in which Denise Levertov, John Berryman, and J. V. Cunningham publish their best collections so far. But more than these particular volumes, the quarter offers—as the age does—many poets who are so highly competent at their craft that they have made themselves worthy of being seized by the Muse when the Muse will. That is to say, the age has a dominant style sufficient for a poet to say many things worth saying within it; or else, if he is obliged to forge his own style, mastery of the dominant style will give him craftsmanship adequate for most of the needs he is likely to have. The pejorative name for this style is academic; but the onus of the name would matter a good deal more if those who hurl it as an insult so freely were themselves half as competent at the craft of verse as the academics they scorn. Surely any style is in a state of good health which can show in one quarter five first books of poems as well constructed as are those of Kessler, Legler, Petersen, Reynolds, and Rubin.[6] There are of course many things these poets cannot do because of the style they share, but to say this is to say no more than that they know and accept certain limits; what matters is that within these limits they can and do accomplish work of fine craftsmanship.

The rest of this chronicle will consist of considerations of certain books by various poets. They are arranged in three sections, according to a politics of prosody: rightists (Cunningham, Wright, Trypanis,

[6] A ROAD CAME ONCE, by *Milton Kessler*. Ohio State. $3.75. A CHANGE OF VIEW, by *Philip Legler*. Nebraska. $3. THE SPECTRAL BOY, by *Donald Petersen*. Wesleyan. $1.85. RYOANJI, by *Tim Reynolds*. Harcourt, Brace and World. $3.95. THE WORLD'S OLD WAY, by *Larry Rubin*. Nebraska. $1.50.

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and Walcott); leftists (Berryman, Eberhart, Smith, Schwerner, and Levertov); and a nihilist manqué (Shapiro).[7]

The Journal of John Cardan consists of 28 poems reprinted from Cunningham's comprehensive collection of 1960, *The Exclusions of a Rhyme*; of "The Quest of the Opal: A Commentary on *The Helmsman*," in which the poet, in the third person, discusses his poetic practice, with references to the 28 poems included in the volume; of "The Journal of John Cardan," a collection of twelve paragraphs of quite abstract pensées; and of a brief essay, "The Problem of Form." The most interesting point in the essays is the case Cunningham makes for prosodic conservatism as the extremest course open to a poet in the present age. The last paragraph of "The Problem of Form" reads:

> [The problem of form in the poetry of our day] is before all a problem of meter. We have lost the repetitive harmony of the old tradition, and we have not established a new. We have written to vary or violate the old line, for regularity we feel is meaningless and irregularity meaningful. But a generation of poets, acting on the principles and practice of significant variation, have at last nothing to vary from. The last variation is regularity.

To What Strangers, What Welcome is a (handsomely printed) pamphlet consisting of a sequence of fifteen short poems. The sequence as a whole, and about half of the poems severally, seem to me to be much the best poetry Cunningham has written. The poet is driving to the western part of the United States to visit a woman from whom he is alienated but whom he still loves; they meet and make love; then he returns to New England. The conventional way, nowadays, of handling such a subject is to make a nude, blaming confession in free verse, every pimple picked. Cunningham attires his subject formally, and his courtesy is so radical that he refrains from blaming anyone, even himself. This is the second poem.

> On either side of the white line
> The emblems of a life appear
> In turn: purpose like lodgepole pine
> Competitive and thin, and fear

[7] THE JOURNAL OF JOHN CARDAN, by *J. V. Cunningham*. Swallow. $2.50. TO WHAT STRANGERS, WHAT WELCOME, by *J. V. Cunningham*. Swallow. $1.75. ETRUSCAN PRINCESS, by *Celeste Turner Wright*. Swallow, The New Poetry Series. $2. GROOVES IN THE WIND, by *C. A. Trypanis*. Chilmark Press. $3.50. SELECTED POEMS, by *Derek Walcott*. Farrar, Straus. $4. 77 DREAM SONGS, by *John Berryman*. Farrar, Straus. $3.95. THE QUARRY, by *Richard Eberhart*. Oxford. $4.75. SELECTED POEMS, by *Stevie Smith*. New Directions. $1.50. THE LIGHT-FALL, by *Armand Schwerner*. Hawk's Well Press. $1. O TASTE AND SEE, by *Denise Levertov*. New Directions. $3. THE BOURGEOIS POET, by *Karl Shapiro*. Random House. $1.95.

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Agile as aspen in a storm.
And then the twilit harboring
In a small park. The room is warm.
And by the ache of traveling

Removed from all immediacy,
From all time, I as time grows late
Sense in disordered fantasy
The sound and smell of love and hate.

Only a master could create a whole poem various, powerful, and subtle enough to elevate that last line from banal iambs into eloquence.

Perfection of form has long been Cunningham's way. Because of his high intelligence and consummate craftsmanship, the epigram has been the chief medium of his perfection. In the present sequence of poems, he has also provided content of sufficient emotional power to fructify that aridity which perfection is liable to. And the last one says, even out of context, as much about the vasty problem of identity as a poem can hope to say well.

Identity, that spectator
Of what he calls himself, that net
And aggregate of energies
In transient combination—some
So marginal are they mine? Or is
There mine? I sit in the last warmth
Of a New England fall, and I?
A premise of identity
Where the lost hurries to be lost,
Both in its own best interests
And in the interests of life.

Most of Celeste Turner Wright's poems are occasional, about actual places or things. Two-thirds of them are in sonnet or quatrain form; all are iambic. None are personal or intense. Their diction and syntax are conventional. No one of them stands out startlingly above the others. Yet reading the whole collection affords a considerable pleasure, the pleasure of becoming acquainted with a mind which is decorous, decent, good-humored, intelligent, and interested in some of the things of the world rather than in itself. In an age of violent extremes and mad perplexities, it is useful from time to time, and even needful for balance, to quiet down enough to listen to an acquaintance talk of this and that in the accents of civilized understanding, especially when, as in the case of Miss Wright, the decency is not achieved by a refusal to look at what is there in the world. Here is the last half of "Aztec Calendar Stone."

Ever meticulous their piety:

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"Harvest the prisoners like precious grain!
These are the sungod's own; his tongue protrudes,
Craving the distillate of every vein."

Nice their discrimination, notable:
For the great altar where such liquors run,
This was their choice, an adamantine wheel
Spoked with the months and axled with the sun.

C. A. Trypanis is a Greek who has for many years been a professor of medieval and modern Greek at Oxford. The poems in his collection all have the feeling of being footnotes to experience, and a third of the poems quote the literary text which has provided the experience they footnote. A small handful comment on something taken from ordinary experience rather than from that of art or history, but they no less than the others have a scholarly air to them. That is, each poem is an elaboration of a single thought, and this thought supplants the complex feelings antecedent to it. The poems are worth reading much as Dr. Johnson's notes on Shakespeare are worth reading: many of the thoughts are valuable in themselves and nearly all are provocative, and they are very well expressed. "Masks do not hide, they shape the human heart." Good. Or, better yet, the ending of "Pedasus" (in *The Iliad,* a mortal horse whom Patroclus yoked with immortal steeds and who was killed by Sarpedon).

The Fates must chuckle in their toothless chins,
Seeing how cunningly they spun things out.
Mortals and gods are just as badly off—
The haughty gods, if anything, worse off.
The old girls stabbed us in the back with the same
Knife, we can't escape from death, nor they from life.

Not long ago the papers carried an account of a man in Japan who had a parasite in his stomach which converted rice into alcohol: he was his own still. Some poets are like that, George Barker, Frederic Prokosch, the early W. S. Merwin, and now Derek Walcott. Feed one of them eight nouns, three verbs, seven modifiers, and a handful of connectives, and they are high as a kite. Here is the last part of a poem on a stranded tarpon.

Can all complexities of shape,
all bulk, terror and fury fit
in a design so innocent,
that through opaque, phantasmal mist,
moving, but motionlessly, it
sails where the imagination sent?

That is surely sumptuous enough in the ear, and for pages and pages

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Walcott's poetry gongs on without letting up on the sonority. Before long, you yearn for something intellectually hard and dry, for an event emotionally astringent, for a verbal awkwardness forced upon the poet by the need to say something difficult accurately. In the passage quoted, "moving, but motionlessly" is far too easy a paradox; the two "alls" fill the mouth but blur the understanding; and the last verb is in the past tense for the sake of rhyme alone. Maybe the god will seize this poet some time and use his melodious voice to make dark and powerful revelations. When that happens, the world will attend, as it did to Dylan Thomas. May it happen.

John Berryman's *77 Dream Songs* are, at their best, so extremely good, and they are at all times so peculiar, that I am reduced to the last strategy of uncertainty in matters of taste, counting my reactions. Of the 77 poems, I think I understand 27, though I would not undertake to paraphrase a single one of these; I know I fail to understand part of 22, though I think I understand their general meaning; and I know I totally fail to understand 28. The author in a prefatory note warns the reader: "Many opinions and errors in the Songs are to be referred not to the character Henry, still less to the author, but to the title of the work." With this in mind, I presume to think that #31 is intentionally mixed up and that to enjoy the confusion and hijinks of the scramble is to understand what the poem is about.

> Henry Hankovitch, con guitar,
> did a short Zen pray,
> on his tatami in a relaxed lotos
> fixin his mind on nuffin, rose-blue breasts,
> and gave his parnel one French kiss.

But in the rest I think my failures are attributable neither to the poet's playing with confusion nor to the dreams which the poems are supposed to suggest. Perhaps, after many have read the poems, talked them over, written about them, annotated them, some of the obscurities will be cleared up to the greater pleasure of readers. Meanwhile, I think that the difficulties in these poems lie less in my ignorance than in their own incoherence.

Difficulties of reference are easily cured by footnotes. But difficulties of connection have no such cure, and in these poems they are numerous. Pronouns without antecedents, logical leaps with sign-posts omitted or pointed the wrong way (causal connectives where no cause exists), anacoluthons, peculiar emphases—the effect of too many of these is obscurantism. For my own part, if such obscurities in a poem were to be justified by an exegete, I still would not like it much; exegesis of this sort commonly assumes the reader is defective, not the poem, an assumption I resent. I also doubt that the obscurities of these first 77 dream songs will be cleared up when Berryman shall have com-

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pleted the total sequence. For the book gives no sense of total structure, and such themes as recur seem to owe their appearance to little more than the poet's own concerns and experiences.

The poems that strike me as being best—1, 16, 21, 46, 54, 67, and maybe 40 and 60—I read as marvelous play by a passionate, despairing, cracked, erudite, utterly poetic genius. Moreover, though they are called dream songs, and though they are apparently supposed to be the dreams of a character "Henry" (who, in 17 of the poems, is joined by "Mr. Bones"), I do not read the poems as songs, nor can I read many of them as dreams; and I read Henry and Mr. Bones as being no more than playful half-masks for John Berryman, Halloween masks covering only the eyes and part of the cheeks. In a strange way, the poems do not mean anything much; that is, their value comes not from any ideas or emotions or experiences or things they refer to and derive from; it comes from the virtuosity of the poet. They are pure poets' poems: even one with few devices and disguises is still so contrived (in the best sense) that the anguish which the poem may be about affects the reader less than the poet's artifice.

Here is #29. Formally it is standard: it is composed of three irregularly rhyming stanzas of six irregular lines each. (Five of the 77 have an additional stanza of one, two, or three lines.) The first and third stanzas of #29 seem to me magical, but I cannot quite incorporate the middle stanza into a reading of the poem. Meanwhile, it can serve to illustrate certain of Berryman's techniques, good and bad.

> There sat down, once, a thing on Henry's heart
> só heavy, if he had a hundred years
> & more, & weeping, sleepless, in all them time
> Henry could not make good.
> Starts again always in Henry's ears
> the little cough somewhere, an odour, a chime.
>
> And there is another thing he has in mind
> like a grave Sienese face a thousand years
> Would fail to blur the still profiled reproach of. Ghastly,
> with open eyes, he attends, blind.
> All the bells say: too late. This is not for tears;
> thinking.
>
> But never did Henry, as he thought he did,
> end anyone and hacks her body up
> and hide the pieces, where they may be found.
> He knows: he went over everyone, & nobody's missing.
> Often he reckons, in the dawn, them up.
> Nobody is ever missing

That accent mark on "só" in the second line is just as irksome in

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Berryman as it was in Hopkins: bossy. The ampersands are pointless. "In all them time" is an instance of the babytalk which pervades the poems, this one less than most. The inversions illustrate one of a large variety of hyperliterary devices which the poet employs. This poem does not include one device: Mr. Bones usually (though not in two of the poems in which he appears) speaks literarily, while the interlocutor commonly speaks in a kind of minstrel darky-talk.

> —you may be right, Friend Bones.
> Indeed you is. Dey flyin ober de world,
> de pilots, ober ofays.

If one adds to these devices a wide literary and learned reference, to say nothing of what seem to be many personal references, the possibility for confusion is endless. The successful poems do not omit these devices and references; rather they employ them so flamboyantly that the greatest pleasure the poems afford is this very juggling. To watch and follow a poet shift voices a dozen times in a single coherent poem, from the lowest to the highest styles not excluding clichés and ad-talk, is a strange and exhilarating delight. So far as I can make out, the various styles and languages and references are there primarily to provide matter for this superb juggler to throw around in astonishing patterns. Bravo!

Richard Eberhart's poetry is excellent only when it is religious in theme and tone, and not always then. In an interview with Denis Donoghue (*Shenandoah,* Summer 1964) Eberhart says that over the years many of his most successful poems have been god-given. I believe him, for those poems have an elevation and intensity quite incommensurate with most of those he has published. When the god speaks through him, the words come out right; sometimes when he meditates on religious subjects, he entrances himself, as it were, and the words come out mostly right; but a lot of the time, when he is being occasional or playful, everything goes wrong. No highly self-critical craftsman would write, much less publish, poems as embarrassing as "Father and Son" and "Father and Daughter"; but then, highly self-critical craftsmen are much less likely to be seized by the god, whose taste is not always impeccable; and what a poet gives the world importantly is his good poems, not the average of his good and fair and bad. None of the poems in *The Quarry* are of the high, inspired kind. The three best ones are meditative: a very long parable called "The Kite," and the two long concluding Meditations. In these the poet talks himself up to a pitch such that the big abstract nouns and ideas which are a source of gas in his bad poems here become sources of elevation. The poems rejoice in themselves.

> I sing the harmony of the instant of knowing
> When all things dual become a unity.

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The power of the mind to envisage singleness,
The purpose of the hand to shape lovingness.

If I sing Aeschylean right-mindedness,
It is of myself mostly that I sing,

Hoping the improbable advent of unity
Will triumph over the mocking dualisms

Which, each seeming real, yearly tore me
In the macerations of their blooded factions.

Stevie Smith's poetry is excellent only when it is not religious. She fancies a mystical style, but it is much too cute—a sort of hybrid of Blake and Milne, archly holy. But some of the time she puts down a thought without fanciness, and then she can be sensible and intelligent in a low-keyed way: "Why are the clergy of the Church of England / Always altering the words of the prayers in the Prayer Book?/ Cranmer's touch was surer than theirs, do they not respect him?" The most successful poems are lyrical, fragile, melancholy; delicacy of tone is their accomplishment, not depth of whacky revelation. Miss Smith is probably not as artless as she puts on; but her book has the effect of being tossed off by a poet who every so often just happens to make it. Generally, she shows with promiscuous pride, like an insect-catching child, every bug she has caught, a few of which happen to be lovely moths and butterflies. Of the four I like best—"Infelice", "Love Me!", "The Orphan Reformed", and "Not Waving but Drowning"—here is the last and shortest.

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.

At first reading Armand Schwerner's *The Lightfall* seems to be free-verse surrealism, that is, solemn and empty. But after a while you begin to hear the subtle modulations in rhythm and sound patterns, and

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to feel that what he is saying matters. One of the poems, "The Magic Runner," emerges free of all trickery into the full accomplishment of intense, contemplative poetry. Unfortunately it will not excerpt well and is too long to reproduce here. My impression is that in this one poem, and perhaps in a couple of others which I have not cracked yet, he considers a high and hidden metaphysical subject with the subtlety, range, freshness, and formal sureness which the subject requires. He is quoted on the flap: "the poet is at best able to say the next-to-last thing." That statement probably means something, though it smacks a bit of those manifestos of intention which modern painters have a weakness for; in any case, it suggests very well what Schwerner has accomplished in "'The Magic Runner." The poem passes the razor test and means something too.

In *O Taste and See,* Denise Levertov demonstrates herself the true and worthy heir of William Carlos Williams. It is not only that she employs a free verse which at its most successful is more like his than like anyone else's, nor is it that she too writes poems that sound, as many of his did, like fragments of experience. More than these resemblances, her spirit is like his, the female to his male, both of them praising and full of the power to live. No one of her poems in this book is as full and as marvelously satisfying as some of his late poems were; she has not yet the amplitude for such singing; but she is getting there. And she has a spiritual quality that matters more than any technical consideration in a verse this loose: sureness. The book as a whole reveals her, and she is worthy of being revealed. Some of the poems are a bit silly, a couple are rather pompous, and there is no theme holding them together. Yet the whole book is greater than the sum of its parts or than any one of its parts (in a way that is true of none of the other books here under review, except Cunningham's). Of the baker's dozen which I like best, I must mention at least "O Taste and See", "Gone Away", "Hypocrite Women", "Our Bodies", and above all "Losing Track". And if these do not melt you, the delicate, tender little short story "Say the Word" surely will. It is perfectly clear that Miss Levertov knows how sex and love have come to be divorced, and about how impossible marriage is in the modern world, and all that; and she is honest about her knowledge. But she is glad she was born anyway, and she gets (and gives) much pleasure from rejoicing over those occasions when sex and love marry in her, and over being married, body and soul, just as she is to her husband just as he is. It is as though she were saying to the reader: "I don't want to dump my troubles on you, though God knows I have them, but I do want to share my joys with you." When you read this book you come to know somebody whom you are glad to know. She does not complain about how modern man has lost communion, she causes a little of it to come into being. Here is "Losing Track":

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Long after you have swung back
away from me
I think you are still with me:

you come in close to the shore
on the tide
and nudge me awake the way

a boat adrift nudges the pier:
am I a pier
half-in half-out of the water?

and in the pleasure of that communion
I lose track,
the moon I watch goes down, the

tide swings you away before
I know I'm
alone again long since,

mud sucking at gray and black
timbers of me,
a light growth of green dreams drying

How beautifully, once she gets a poem started, she brings it to its satisfying completion, every time.

It is a relief to come out and say at the outset how intensely I dislike *The Bourgeois Poet* by Karl Shapiro. When I first read it, I was going to be polite about it, as the three poets (Adrienne Rich, Donald Justice, and William Dickey) were about the sections they commented on in the Ostroff symposium. I thought I was going to have to talk about how the book lacks order, the parts are poorly structured, and the rhythms become boring, when all the time what I really wanted to say was that the book revealed mainly how unhappy the poet was, which is no business of a reviewer's. But I came to realize that his private dissatisfactions—with himself, his job, his country, his culture, poetry, morality, and practically everything else except Henry Miller—are quite incidental to his main intention. This I gather from an essay of his in the April 1964 *College English,* from his response to the three poets in the symposium, and from the six pseudo lectures he gave last spring at Carleton College, printed in the summer issue of the *Carleton Miscellany.* These pieces of prose managed to persuade me that, preposterous as it seems, he wants the reader to take him at his word in *The Bourgeois Poet*: he is sincere.

Let me dispose now of the unimportant matter of what kind of bad poetry Shapiro has written in this book. It belongs in a loose tradi-

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tion of religious, pseudo-religious, or self-prophesying incantation: The Book of Revelations, Traherne, Smart, Blake, Baudelaire's prose poems, Whitman above all, and Ginsberg. Shapiro says he is striving to write anti-poetry; what he has produced is a sort of low-grade Whitmanesque non-verse, which may or may not be anti but is surely pseudo poetry. But all this is irrelevant anyway; Shapiro says he is not intending to write good poetry and he is right. He intends, I think, to change things by attacking them—literature, society, you. He does not want you to say "what a handsome axe"; he wants to cut your head off.

He believes that poetry, religion, Western civilization are dying or dead, and that only violent measures will be able to sweep away the debris and bring forth the new, as yet unknown, state of things to follow. "We want a poetry that is neither moral nor immoral nor amoral. Unmoral is good enough." This opinion is quite conventional among literary intellectuals these days, but Shapiro wants to take direct action on it. He intends his book to be a two-edged instrument for demolition and salvaging at once. If society no longer exists except as a parody of community, then a poet (and poets are under any circumstances egotistical) must concern himself only with what he knows, himself, if he is to do his job. In sum, Shapiro is recognizably a rebellious egotist writing in the mode of Henry Miller. He also proclaims his philosophical allegiance to Sade: he aspires to nihilistic Satanism and inveighs against order like a true Sadist (not the sadist of ordinary usage, but a person who understands the Marquis' teachings and examples). However, coming as it does in a time without authority or firm conventions and rules, Shapiro's would-be nihilism has the effect of being highly literary, derivative, and out-of-date. Sadistic rebellion is so designed as to work well against a tyrannical king, but against a permissive and floundering democracy it is at most perniciously nasty without achieving any major destruction. As Snodgrass said about other rebellions (in the Ostroff book): "Nothing is really produced, since these rebellions are directed against powers which do not exist."

The Bourgeois Poet certainly does not fail because Shapiro cannot write good enough self-prophesying incantation; on the contrary, his ear is still excellent though he abuses it, his wit is lively, his intelligence and learning are considerable, his emotions vigorous. Partly the failure is due to anachronism. But chiefly it comes from the way he confesses. This in turn is caused by defects of Shapiro's own self, defects which, in the days when he was a pro poet, he either did not have or else disguised and turned to advantage. If a book is to serve as a double-edge weapon forged of the writer's own self, then that self had better be hard and strong: Shapiro's is neither. His assertions that he is a coward, a hypocrite, and a liar are made so aggressively that one is invited to admire him for his stern honesty, as one in some sense admires Genet in *A Thief's Journal*. But in the delicate matter of con-

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fessing sins publicly, less depends upon how harsh the writer is with himself than upon the manner with which he exposes himself to the reader. Try though he will, Shapiro cannot help inviting you to regard him as being not only weak and full of faults but also charming, winning, and chic. Shapiro, as Genet does not, wants you to gasp at his vileness and like him anyway. But a writer cannot have it both ways: a man who like Genet succeeds in making himself appear revolting you do not like much, and conversely you are not likely to be appalled by a man who like Shapiro is rather winsome.

These excerpts are from the first part of the 34th section.

> I am an atheist who says his prayers.
> I am an anarchist, and a full professor at that. I take the loyalty oath.
> A physical coward, I take on all intellectuals, establish poets, popes, rabbis, chiefs of staff.
> I am of the race wrecked by success. The audience brings me news of my death. I write out of boredom, despise solemnity. The wrong reason is good enough for me.
> How beautifully I fake! I convince myself with men's room jokes and epigrams. I paint myself into a corner and escape on pulleys of the unknown. Whatever I think at the moment is true. Turn me around in my tracks; I will take your side.
> For the rest, I improvise and am not spiteful and water the plants on the cocktail table.

The following quotation is taken from Shapiro's reply to his poet-critics in the symposium.

> Mr. Dickey wonders about the order of the poems in the final work. So does my publisher. So do I. Most books of poems, curiously, do have an order. At one point I literally did the Jackson Pollack or *I Ching* trick: I dropped the pages from the top of a ladder and picked them up at random. There is no order, thematic or chronological. At the very last, however, when it was time to submit the manuscript, or after the first editorial objection to the disorder, I chickened out. The manuscript is now a triptych, one section more prone to autobiography, another more prone to sounding-off, one specializing in the erotic, so to say.

Far from being another Satan, so to say, he is not even a fallen angel. The title of the six pseudo lectures he gave at Carleton is "A Malebolge of 1400 Books." In the eighth circle of Dante's Hell, a malebolgia is one of ten ditches peopled by frauds.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Pursy Windhum Lucigen

PERCY WYNDHAM LEWIS WAS BORN IN 1882 and like the rest of us began by sponging off his mother; the difference being, however, that he refused to be weaned and kept it up till he was nigh to thirty, whereupon the poor lady, none too well nourished herself, died. Percy's hysteria when no one, and more especially his 'mother country,' would offer a surrogatory tit, continued the rest of his life, or nearly; and a more pitiable, childish, and ultimately tedious spectacle is unlikely to be found among English men of letters, or among the latter-day Parnassians generally.

Unflattering as it is and even, if you like, 'dirty,' this is all that the reader of Lewis' correspondence can conclude.[1] Or almost all. The book itself, handsome and substantial, has been edited with scholarly care and also with a certain warmth and imagination; but beyond that, since the selection Professor Rose has made from the extant correspondence comprises, he says, about a fourth, we must, being ignorant of the rest, reserve final judgment of his editorial skill. Nevertheless, he appears to have done a good job. More important, we are told that the selection is representative, we notice that the book is dressed up with baby pictures, footnotes, copious prefaces, etc., and we conclude that the project is attended with scholarly earnestness and an air of quasi-finality. Hence I see no reason why we should withhold our judgment of its subject, Lewis himself. Like all collections of letters, this is a book about a man. In this case the man was also a painter, novelist, and critic; but it was not the painter, novelist, or critic who wrote these letters, it was the man. Those who offer us the letters are, by so doing, inviting us to judge the man alone. Nor is this judgment trivial: first because the man happened to be a figure of some importance in his time; second because the man indubitably did create the paintings, novels, and works of criticism.

Percy was born on board his father's yacht, which had been tied up for the occasion at Amherst, Nova Scotia. His father was a wealthy young Canadian, his mother a goodlooking young Englishwoman. Not long afterward, however, they separated, and the mother took Percy to live in England, where she sent him in due course to various public schools. She had a hard time, it appears. Percy's father was frequently in default of the cash remittances customary in such circumstances, and we are left with the impression that he was squandering his substance in the fleshpots of the Maritimes; though for that matter as far as I know no one has troubled to investigate his side of the story. At

[1] THE LETTERS OF WYNDHAM LEWIS, edited by *W. K. Rose*. New Directions. $8.50.

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any event, Mrs. Lewis maintained herself and her son through her own ingenuity and hard labor in various shoestring enterprises, chiefly shopkeeping. Percy was at the same time washing out of the schools to which he had been entrusted, and at age sixteen, when he stood twenty-sixth in his class of twenty-six at Rugby, he gave it up as a bad job. Later he attended the Slade School of Art, where his talents for drawing were recognized and encouraged. In 1902 he went abroad, and until 1910 lived in Paris, Madrid, Munich, and the Netherlands, attended occasional lectures, made paintings and drawings, dressed in a black cape, and generally pursued *la vie di bohême*, as it was still properly so called in those antediluvian days. The only letters offered to us from this period are those to his mother. They are filled with cheerful condolences for her hardships, both physical and financial, and with reports on his expenditures for lodging, food, and models. During most of this time he apparently sent his dirty laundry home to London to be washed, and his letters often contain requests for books and other articles to be enclosed in the returning packages. Most of the letters also contain requests for money. In 1907, when he was twenty-five, he wrote: "Chère Maman, Well, so long as you give me enough to keep me in food, etc. and pay for the stove, etc., it's all I can expect . . ." Etc., etc., etc. At the same time, one ought not to deprecate the affectionate tone of these letters; it seems clear that mother and son were held in a close relationship by a deeply felt mutual need.

Lewis had always mingled writing with his art studies, but it is difficult to tell how serious he was in his first attempts, of which we have no specimens. They were poems, apparently, and were destroyed by Lewis, or perhaps suppressed by his executors after his death. In 1909, however, he sold a story to Ford Madox Hueffer's *English Review*, a success which led him, in 1910, to return to England and establish himself in London. Quickly he became engaged in the ferment of the new esthetics, along with Pound, Hulme, and the rest; the story is well-known. The part played by Lewis is somewhat difficult to assess. Certainly he was not the leader; but he brought from France a genuine Fauvist and Cubist enthusiasm, and no doubt his knowledge of the plastic arts contributed something valuable to the program. Beyond that, his personality must have been congenial to the others. The word *biting* as applied to intelligence has lost its meaning through overuse, but it can be momentarily restored by saying, emphatically, that this was the quality which distinguished Lewis from Pound, acute as the latter could be and often was. In later years Lewis disputed with Pound for the credit of having originated Vorticism. The truth seems to be that although Pound invented the term and contributed several characteristic pronouncements to their joint magazine, *Blast,* it was Lewis who did most of the work and furnished most of the enthsuiasm. And without doubt he was the one responsible for exporting the new sensibility from the literary to the artistic centers; he was busy during

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these years with exhibitions, workshops, art publications. Concurrently, he kept up his other writing. He was extraordinarily productive, in short, as he continued to be for the rest of his life. In 1914 he began serious work on his first novel, *Tarr*.

The war was, for Lewis as for everyone, a waste of time, yet he took to it with aplomb. After casting about ineffectually for an easy commission, he enlisted as a common soldier, trained in an artillery batallion, and won a second-lieutenancy in the regular way. At the front, though he grumbled eloquently over the military snafus, he was a fearless and even enthusiastic soldier. Those who have read Mitchell Goodman's fine novel *The End of It* will have an illuminating cross-reference for the following two sentences from a letter to Pound dated September, 1917: "Ainsi, I was F.O.O. (forward ob officer) of the Group three days ago, and on that occasion had the extreme gratification of seeing, in the midst of our barrage, a large Bosche fly into the air as it seemed a few feet beneath me. From the ridge where I was observing things I looked down into the German front line as you might into Church Street."

Tarr was published in 1918. It was the beginning of a maniacal spate of activity which produced, in the next twenty years, more than twenty books, a great many paintings and drawings, and a steady outpouring of pamphlets, little magazines, manifestoes, reviews, and other ephemera. The letters during this period tell us nothing about Lewis himself; he is a disembodied epistoler. We know, for instance, that he was married in the late Twenties; but the letters contain no mention of it, and at this moment, just having read his lifetime's correspondence, I cannot think of his wife's name. We do not know where he lived or in what circumstances. We know nothing of his tastes in clothing, food, landscapes, climate, architecture, music, or manners. During much of this period he wrote his letters from a safe deposit box in the Pall Mall. In short, Lewis' desire for secrecy became a mania, the private half of the mania which, in public, expressed itself in delusions of persecution. The letters we have in this volume are chiefly of three sorts. A small number are affable but impersonal communications to friends who were so staunch that they refused to quarrel with him, e.g. Augustus John and Roy Campbell. A larger number are requests for money. And the largest number of all are simply a flood of disputation: insults, vituperations, cavils, a sea of self-fomented troubles. His enemies were publishers, rival authors, critics, agents, gallery and museum directors, bureaucrats, the entire cultural community; his Enemy was Anglo-Saxon civilization from top to bottom. He belonged, or wished to belong, to an "elusive but excellent community," the "party of genius," "outside any milieu or time"; but it was too "elusive," it didn't exist, and this nonexistence, thrust continually into his face, exasperated him to the point of unabated bad temper. But more than bad: evil.

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Why? What was it all about? In one of his more temperate remarks, Lewis spoke, late in his life when he was reviewing a new sculpture by Henry Moore, of "how important it is to know how to circumvent the natural platitude of the dimensions of life." There it is; he had been saying it for thirty years, and he continued till his death. Whatever other faults he had, he was neither dishonest nor obscure, and his style, though complex and overheated, hit with ringing clarity upon the crucial words. When he said "circumvent," he meant precisely that; and when he said "platitude" it was like a snarl. Life was unbearable, reality was unbearable, nature and the body were totally corrupt; their adherents, the naturalists of every camp, were not only corrupt but conspiratorial; only art and the mind could preserve the "aristocracy of intellect" from the nihilism which had resulted, paradoxically, from an emotionally charged misreading of Nietzsche. And thus Lewis joined the anti-realists, those who would invent Being from the misapprehended dynamisms of esthetics. He became for England what Gottfried Benn was for Germany—the parallel is astonishingly exact—and if his course was the opposite from that of Céline's in France, they both had begun at the same point and their effects were strangely similar: Céline destroyed the body through exercises of nauseated lust, Lewis destroyed it through the annihilating decrees of his revulsed and frigid mind. These and their allies created the New Parnassus, which their disciples have turned into the New Philistia. Lewis' novels are peopled by Ideas, beings of style, creatures as sexless as himself, for only these could exist in the unreality of the devalued universe; and if as a painter he acquired among the élite a certain reputation as a portraitist, it was because he bestowed upon his sitters a firm machine-like flesh, which sometimes seemed desirable in the Thirties. He was England's Léger, but totally without Léger's humor and compassion. Politically, Lewis' course was predictable: outspoken, unqualified support of Hitler and Franco.

When the second war came, Lewis left England and went to North America, boarding ship the day before England declared war on Germany. No matter how Professor Rose minimizes this escape, the inference is unavoidable that Lewis left his country because he feared for his safety after his years of Nazi vociferation (even though he had publicly changed his mind about Hitler the year before). But once in North America, where he suffered grievously from the climate, the people, and the restrictions of the war, he gradually slipped into a new self-delusion, viz. that he had left England solely for financial reasons and now wished nothing better than to return. If only he could raise the fare for the clipper flight to Lisbon and thence to London. . . . Of course he could not.

Frankly, I was so nauseated by these wartime letters that I skipped over to the final section of the book: Lewis at home again, the grand old man ensconced finally in the admiration of younger writers, critics,

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and publishers. The metamorphosis at last occurs. The tone of his attacks softens, though the attacks continue until the end, and he now spends a good deal of time writing in kindly condescension to his disciples and well-wishers. He resumes friendships with Eliot and Pound on a much more equable basis than formerly, and he keeps up a steady though ineffectual campaign to secure Pound's release from St. Elizabeth's. He dispenses generous and chiefly sound advice to younger writers. He becomes, in short, Le Vieux, the only rôle he could conceivably play with any degree of charm. It was during this period that those who are now his advocates, including Professor Rose, first met him and corresponded with him. What accounted for the change? One can't be sure. I doubt that the tragedy, a very true tragedy, of his blindness was enough to bring it about, or even his eventual knowledge that the loss of vision was caused by an inoperable growth inside his head which was methodically killing him. Lewis had been quite critically ill in the Thirties (though the nature of his illness, like everything else about his personal life, is darkly hidden) without any moderating result, and his suffering during the war had merely changed him from a blaster into a whiner. More likely his mellowing was simply an effect of the new sympathy he detected in the intellectual milieu of postwar England, coupled with the natural decline of his advancing years. The old battles were over, after all; and if he had abandoned his outposts, so had his adversaries. Stephen Spender, who only yesterday had been the young radical, was one of the first to offer his services as a reader when the news of Lewis' blindness became known.

This book of letters gives us a man who grew from adolescence to senility in one movement. Emotional maturity and that part of intellectual maturity which rests upon emotional factors were denied him. He belonged, without a doubt, to the Party of Genius; we look back on that Party only with regret, first that its brilliance was so perverse, second that we lack its means in pursuing our so much more serious ends. What estimate the years to come will place on Lewis' works I do not know, of course. I shall be surprised and sorry if his writing comes to be valued as art, i.e. as something necessary to the life of man in a condition of civilization. But I won't be surprised if a few of his many works, especially *Childermass* and *The Revenge for Love,* retain a reputation as glittering examples of what can be done within a convention of sterility. In either case, I refrain from the judgment. I don't say a man may not create his own reality from considerations of style. So may a man raise himself by his own bootstraps, speaking in terms of the inner synthesis. But for the onlookers it remains merely a feat of levitation, a curiosity, a sideshow which exists simply by virtue of its apriori irresponsibility, and in the present instance the performer happens also to be a remarkably ugly man. I am content to pass on to the next attraction.

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PAUL LEVINE

Individualism and the Traditional Talent

> I have ever hated all nations, professions and communities, and all my love is towards individuals. —Jonathan Swift

THE NOMINATION OF BARRY GOLDWATER—the stuff that bad dreams and novels are made of—proves once again that modern life is as grotesque as modern art. Yet intellectuals are conservative, too, and they might take solace in the fact that the values and themes of recent fiction remain unchanged.[1] Thus we have an Italian novel about *la dolce vita,* an English novella about a boarding school, and some American short stories about the army. Thus Brendan Behan describes the Dublin *hoi polloi*; Georges Simenon, a successful middle-aged Frenchman; and Jack Gelber, pot smokers in New York. Not that I'm suggesting a "new conservatism" in literature but rather that the distance between the *avant garde* and the traditional talent has narrowed in the almost universal focus upon the individual.

For instance, Elaine Dundy and Kingsley Amis are back at their old stands, sticking pins in their favorite wax figures. Both have turned the traditional comedy of manners into the new satire on foreign relations in which a hip American girl seeks her fortune in upper-class England while a square English publisher seeks his in middle-class America. Amis's *One Fat Englishman* is *Lucky Jim* in reverse: rotund Roger Micheldane exhibits the worst of merrie England—being selfish, snobbish, stubborn and smug—in his quest for a more perfect expression of the seven deadly sins. On safari in American academia, Michel-

[1] ONE FAT ENGLISHMAN, by *Kingsley Amis.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95. THE OLD MAN AND ME, by *Elaine Dundy.* Dutton. $4.50. THE SNOW BALL and THE FINISHING TOUCH, by *Brigid Brophy.* World. $4.95. THE SCARPERER, by *Brendan Behan.* Doubleday. $3.95. CANDY, by *Terry Southern* and *Mason Hoffenberg.* Putnam. $5.00. ON ICE, by *Jack Gelber.* MacMillan. $4.95. THE MORTAL WOUND, by *Raffaele La Capria.* Farrar, Straus. $4.75. COLLECTED SHORT STORIES, by *Robert Graves.* Doubleday. $4.95. THE LEPER AND OTHER STORIES, by *Milovan Djilas.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.95. COLD GROUND WAS MY BED LAST NIGHT, by *George Garrett.* University of Missouri Press. $3.75. THE THIRTIETH YEAR, by *Ingeborg Bachmann.* Knopf. $4.95. THE PLANT, THE WELL, THE ANGEL, by *Vassilis Vassilikos.* Knopf. $5.95. THE DEATH OF ARTEMIO CRUZ, by *Carlos Fuentes.* Farrar, Straus. $4.95. THE BELLS OF BICÊTRE, by *Georges Simenon.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.95. SECOND SKIN, by *John Hawkes.* New Directions. $4.00. THE SPIRE, by *William Golding.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95. THE RECTOR OF JUSTIN, by *Louis Auchincloss.* Houghton, Mifflin. $4.95.

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dane manages to bag a few unsatisfied wives and an erotic Swinburne notebook but Mr. Amis can count only a few hits (a cleric named after a toothpaste and a college named after a beer) and a number of near misses. Except for a horrible wise child and a drunk who methodically destroys his car with an iron bar, Amis's academia is even more pallid than the original; and our final impression is of an inexhaustibly energetic and thoroughly unpleasant fat man insulting a group of department store dummies.

In her poisonous little novel, *The Old Man and Me,* Miss Dundee's heroine seeks to snare her "old man" before he finds out that he is indeed her old man. The *milieu* of Soho bars and Shropshire country houses is cleverly handled and the *liebestod* struggle between Betsy Lou Saegessor and C. D. McKee ends in a witty draw. If C. D. McKee resembles seedy Micheldane—though less of a petulant child and more of a monstrous adult—he is at least given a worthy antagonist in Betsy Lou.

Other aspects of the British social landscape are filled in with a sharp eye and a sure touch by another talented female writer, Brigid Brophy. In two novellas, *The Snow Ball* and *The Finishing Touch,* Miss Brophy gives us two beautifully contrived pictures of mating habits among the natives. *The Snow Ball* draws the sexual geometry of a New Year's Eve costume ball in which a Dona Anna succumbs to her Don Giovanni while a Cherubino is undone by a youthful Casanova. Too ponderously symmetrical to be genuinely Mozartean, *The Snow Ball*'s sexual parallelograms yield in interest to the more subtle characterization of middle-aged Anna. At her best, Miss Brophy recalls Virginia Woolf in the expert handling of the female psyche; thus it comes as no surprise that Anna before a mirror is more revealing than Dona Anna in bed.

Like Virginia Woolf, Miss Brophy is more at home with experience than with innocence. *The Finishing Touch* is a waspish, wispy tale of a debauched finishing school on the French Riviera next to which St. Trinian's seems as conservative as Eton. This jewel of a story is told with a perfect *frisson* that makes its characters more dangerous than Brendan Behan's cutthroats and more decadent than the playmates in *Candy*. For all their shenanigans we know that Mr. Behan's rascals are all lovable at heart and his posthumous novel attests to their incorruptible Irish incorrigibility. Originally published serially by the Irish *Times* in 1953, *The Scarperer* is a genial yarn about some escaped criminals in Dublin and Paris. As in *The Hostage,* Mr. Behan comes up with an incarcerated Limey, some picturesque Irish barflies, and a few brilliantly funny ideas like a barroom rendering of the Lord's prayer—in Welsh. But, as in *The Hostage,* the jokes run out about halfway through, and our interest shortly after.

If Brendan Behan's work suffers from all being a variation on the same joke (the one about the drunk Irishman who . . .), the same

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might be said for Terry Southern's and Mason Hoffenberg's *Candy*. Née *Lollypop* in the Olympia Press edition, *Candy* turns out to be a variation on the old joke about the farmer's daughter who. . . . It is an erotic shaggy dog story as much in the tradition of Sade's *Justine* as Voltaire's *Candide* and like all shaggy dog stories the point lies in the elaboration. Repeatedly ravished and perpetually innocent, Candy Christian is the golden American girl who goes to art movies, listens to Bartok, loves minority groups, believes in "the beautiful, thrilling privilege of giving fully," and, once having given, exclaims, "Well, it's my own fault, darn it." Besides doctors and do-gooders, Zen Buddhists and Jewish mothers, certainly the main butt of the joke is that constant source of amusement on the Left Bank, the American college girl. With her Tabu perfume and lace panties, Candy reflects narcissism, not innocence, and the novel's mincing, sugary style lapses into a kind of babytalk which perfectly mirrors her sensibility.

Readers of Mr. Southern's *The Magic Christian* will recognize Candy as the unconscious relation of Guy Grand, that novel's prankish millionaire who used his money, as Candy uses her body, to "make it hot" for everybody. One of his pranks was to alter a sentimental scene in *The Best Years of Our Lives* to make it seem that the handless war veteran is slipping his hook under the skirt of The Girl Next Door. The desired effect of *Candy* is the same; but even Guy Grand would have been surprised and delighted that so many people mistook it for something more than a clever prank.

Jack Gelber's rough paean to junkies, *The Connection,* was an early document of hipsterism and it should come as no surprise to find him operating out of the same pad in his first novel, *On Ice.* The title is meant to suggest the cool and precarious existence of Manny Fells, a Village hipster who, on a phony resumé, takes a job as a private eye impersonating a camera salesman in a suburban discount house. As might be expected from this description, Mr. Gelber's theme is "identity" and while his *milieu* is familiar—the post-war world that the Whole Sick Crew of Thomas Pyncheon inherited from the whole sick crew of Joseph Heller—he does have some interesting things to say about the difficulty of being your own man these days. "What kind of a world was it," Manny asks when he finds out that his suburban boss and his next door neighbor were army buddies, "that permitted this kind of accessibility?" If "you live in a random universe," and work in a "mercantile universe," and if you aren't interested in "saving a nation or a life . . . preserving democracy or the economy," then what do you do?

> There seemed nothing that presented a real alternative nor anyone to do it for. To stay and acquiesce was out; to stay and fight was ridiculous; to leave for a menial job was avoiding the question; to starve or limp along on small illegalities was begging the question.

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Ironically enough, the central problem for the far out, as for the far right, seems to be one of retaining a rugged individualism in the face of a conformist society. Manny's own resolution—"Be a secret hipster, slowly insinuating your own values [whatever that means] into the hearts of millions"—is undercut by his practical solution and Mr. Gelber's closing description of Manny's drift from disorganized man to Organization Man is suitably ironic but unsatisfactorily facile.

"Since all work is valueless," maintains a character in *On Ice,* "what does it matter how you make your money?" This sentiment is shared by almost everybody in *The Mortal Wound,* Raffaele La Capria's slender, atmospheric account of the sweet life in Naples, "a city that mortally wounds you or lulls you to sleep." Massimo is the young man who is perhaps mortally wounded by his flight from Naples to a job in the real world of Rome. His younger brother, Nino, remains behind to be lulled. The novel is told in a series of flashbacks which contrast a world of faded innocence with a world of jaded experience. Yet Naples is ever "the Virgin Forest" and the final impression in *The Mortal Wound*—winner, appropriately enough, of the Strega Award—is of a jaded innocence close to the narcissism of *Candy.*

A similarity between *The Mortal Wound* and *On Ice* is the particularity of their *milieus.* The translation of Mr. La Capria's novel footnotes special references to Neopolitan life and I couldn't help but wonder if an Italian translation of *On Ice* would annotate such recondite terms as "pot," "boychich," and "schmuckier." A similar concern for local realism marks three new volumes of short stories.

In his *Collected Short Stories,* Robert Graves writes of modern England, ancient Rome and present-day Majorca with equal facility and, eschewing the conventional claims of fiction, he roundly declares that "Most of them, including . . . 'A Toast to Ava Gardner,' are true." Unfortunately, most of them are also trivial; and with the exception of "The Shout," "Christmas Truce," and "The Lost Chinese," too many are distinguished only by the fact that they really happened. Milovan Djilas also relies on his personal experience for the bulk of *The Leper and Other Stories.* But since this experience embraces the Civil War and Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia, his stories may often be crude but they are rarely trivial. Only the long title story consciously separates life from art. "The Leper" is a stylized allegory of the outcast artist whose body is imprisoned but whose indomitable soul is free to sing out the truth. The resemblance to Djilas' long incarceration (while these stories were written) is hard to miss but the author has invested his tale with a naive directness which approximates the special quality of an ancient ballad.

In describing Serbian folklore, Djilas writes that "Their songs do not tell us of the beauty, but of the raw, naked incidents of human existence. They give more facts and statements than poetry . . . and it seems to me that the songs were, therefore, clean, logical, poetical in

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the wider, the unconventional sense." Though this may be the desired effect of *The Leper,* it is the impressive achievement of George Garrett's collection, *Cold Ground Was My Bed Last Night.* From the opening line, "Everybody has got a story about the Bad Sergeant in Basic," we are in a world which readers of modern fiction know almost as well as the writers by now. Mr. Garrett's triumph is not that he glorifies the commonplace but that he tries to understand it. Most of these stories deal with institutional life—the army or the academy—and the protagonists are invariably the non-commissioned officers of society—sergeants, sheriffs and professors—who "stand between the world and [the uninitiated] . . . all too familiar with their vices and stifled virtues . . . the steadfast preserver[s] of those secrets and their illusions." In "The Old Army Game" a draftee learns that "soldiering" means hating, not loafing, while in "Texarcana Was a Crazy Town" a discharged sergeant discovers that the civilian world is more brutal than the army. The long title piece is one of the few modern stories to make complex sense of sudden violence. Mr. Garrett writes in a low-keyed style that makes his incidents seem more ordinary and his stories more extraordinary.

Military and civilian violence are also juxtaposed in the best stories of Ingeborg Bachmann's collection, *The Thirtieth Year.* The children who must grow up during the war in "Youth in an Austrian Town" succeed the adults who must live down the Nazi past in "Among Murderers and Madmen." An Austrian poet with a degree in philosophy, Miss Bachmann writes a kind of abstract fiction which is clean, logical, poetical in its narrower, conventional sense. The title story, for instance, makes us privy to the protagonist's moral state rather than his life, and the prosecution of universal guilt in "A Wildermuth" loses its impact without a writ of *habeas corpus.*

On the other hand, Vassilis Vassilikos combines realism and abstractness to great advantage in three tales about love in modern Greece, *The Plant, The Well, The Angel.* In each case, a simple situation involving a young man and a maid is ornamented with fresh wit and delicacy. In "The Plant," the best and longest novella, the hero transfers his affections from a young girl he has never met to the shrub he has stolen from her. Under his obsessive care the plant flourishes at the center of his life, pushing out family, friend, and neighbors until it poses a definite threat to the community. Vassilikos generally controls the balance between fantasy and reality but his real triumph is the objective treatment of the young man. A parable about the excesses of the romantic imagination and the limitations of the conforming mind, "The Plant" blends everyday reality with extravagant daydream in the manner of Kafka, but Mr. Vassilikos infuses his world with Greek sunlight, not Hassidic shadow.

The hero's victory in "The Plant," as in Djilas' "The Leper," is the triumph of vision over action. Similarly, the failure of vision is the

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central issue of two recent novels. In both Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz* and Georges Simenon's *The Bells of Bicêtre* a successful man reviews the failures of his life as he lies at the point of death. Artemio's failure is both political and personal. Having long ago betrayed the Mexican Revolution for his own profit, he finds his death bed surrounded by a family that hates him and flunkies that fear him. The real subject of the novel is not Cruz's condition as much as Mexico's and the failure of the country comes through in the failure of the man:

> A revolution is shaped on battlefields, but once it is corrupted, though battles are still won, the revolution is lost. We have all been responsible. We have allowed ourselves to be divided and controlled by the ruthless, the ambitious, and the mediocre. Those who wanted a true revolution, radical and uncompromising, are unfortunately ignorant and bloody men. And the literate element want only a half revolution, compatible with what interests them, their only interest, getting on in the world, living well, replacing Don Porfirio's élite. There you have Mexico's drama.

In form as well as content, *Artemio Cruz* is remarkably similar to last year's novel about the failure of the Yugoslav revolution, Mladen Oljača's *A Prayer for My Brethren,* suggesting perhaps the limitations of the impressionistic political novel. Mr. Fuentes seems to write in an aggressive, Hemingwayish style that at one startling point recalls the famous catechism in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place." However, Mr. Fuentes exchanges Hemingway's "nada" for a more conventional four letter word.

Simenon, on the other hand, takes his hero from death's door and escorts him down the more complicated road to recovery. Paralyzed by a stroke, René Maugras reviews his past friendships, affairs, and marriages with a cool detachment that may help reconcile his past to his future. Simenon charts with tight-lipped precision Maugras' slow recuperation; yet this case history of the private man is more individual in its handling of hospital routine than in its treatment of Maugras' life. Everything that Simenon does is competent but as a Gallic Bunyan he is more successful with a pilgrim's process than with a pilgrim's prognosis.

Between the death of Artemio Cruz and the recovery of René Maugras lies the broad expanse of the modern novel. Like *The Bells of Bicêtre,* the new novels of John Hawkes, William Golding, and Louis Auchincloss each register the limited triumph of the individual through the acceptance of his failures. In all three, the issues are played out in terms which sound religious but are indeed skeptical and humanistic.

Skipper, the misfit hero of John Hawkes's *Second Skin,* is no captain of his fate. Self-proclaimed "man of love . . . man of courage . . . But,

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most of all, lover of my harmless and sanguine self," he is one of those attendant lords of modern fiction who muddle through while their Prince Hamlets debate self-destruction. Son of one suicide and father of another, Skipper manages to escape to life on a tropical isle where he finds his "second skin" as an artificial inseminator of cows and the writer of his "naked history."

"Anyone," Skipper remarks, "who has gotten down on his knees to vomit has discovered, if only by accident, the position of prayer." The connection of these two acts—what we might call the joining of the scatological and eschatological visions—is often the price of moral regeneration in modern fiction. Yet for all of Skipper's talk about the Blessed Virgin Mary (referred to as "the BVM") the salvation of Mr Hawkes's picaresque saints lies in their creative, not their Catholic, impulse. *Second Skin's* snake's-eye view of a spiritual underworld is often verbally exciting and visually rewarding but I had a hard time following the motivation of a young lady who wants the name of her absconded homosexual husband tattooed on her father's chest. Mr. Hawkes is a novelist of virtuosic originality, but his tolerance for bizarre effects remains a defect of his imagination.

William Golding's great virtue is also his willingness to attack unhackneyed material; his greatest weakness is an indulgent taste for ponderous allegory. Both are on display in his latest novel, *The Spire,* a vision, as Father Urban called it, "of life in late medieval times, when nothing and nobody was for sure, when kings and prelates were selling out right and left." The title refers to the structure that Dean Jocelyn wishes to add to his cathedral against the advice of everybody, including his master builder. The novel is concerned with the human price of this divine construction: the question is one of religious faith in the face of "what makes no sense at all." Unfairly, perhaps, I thought of T. S. Eliot's great study of religious faith in *Murder in the Cathedral;* but compared to Becket, Jocelyn expresses the fanatical zeal of the potential bigot, not the potential saint. Mr. Golding may be too much of a skeptic himself to depict Jocelyn's vision as less mad and more divine but the resultant impression flattens out the novel, making it not so wide as a church door, nor so deep as a well.

The Spire illustrates Golding's knack for setting his characters in a particularized but abstract environment: his medieval world is most often seen from the top of his spire. Louis Auchincloss' novels, on the other hand, are always notable for their careful rendering of society, and his latest, *The Rector of Justin,* is no exception. Depicting "the world of the private school . . . The world of the gentleman and his ideals. The world of personal honor and a Protestant God," Auchincloss is concerned, like Golding, with a trial of religious faith in an old-fashioned world. The title refers to the founder and headmaster of a New England Episcopal boy's school "named after the early martyr and scholar who tried to reconcile the thinking of the Greek philoso-

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phers with the doctrines of Christ." Visionary Francis Prescott dreams of harmonizing Plato and St. Paul in a school which does more than "train young men for the steam room of the Racket Club" but, for all its emphasis on the humanities, Justin still turns out stock brokers. Hoping to free Justin from "the worldly motive, the power of snobbery, the dollar," Prescott discovers that he "failed to see that snobbishness and materialism were intrinsic in its make-up."

From the impressions of his friends, family, disciples, and enemies, Prescott emerges as a suitably complex character, "a Faust who has sold his soul to God" and "a glorious repertory actor of the Henry Irving school." Though his narrator is impossible (a timid instructor who hangs a portrait of Samuel Richardson over his bed and sounds like Peter Sellers impersonating an English nanny), Auchincloss does a creditable job of projecting the moral conflict between the idealist and the pragmatist in Prescott's soul. But I'm not sure that Auchincloss, like Prescott, isn't more at home with the things that are Caesar's than the things which are God's. Prescott's failure to make Justin "different" results from an excess of idealism, the same generous error which plagues John Hawkes's Skipper and, made fanatical, destroys Golding's Dean Jocelyn. Echoing a popular refrain of modern fiction, *Justin's* narrator maintains "that Dr. Prescott's true greatness lay less in his school than in his impact on individual boys." The hip and the traditional meet in their recognition of human limitations: in a vast world our small triumphs are all personal, our tiny actions all individual. In the folklore of new conservatism, individualism means that nothing succeeds like success. In the mythology of new fiction, individualism means that nothing succeeds like failure.

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J. MITCHELL MORSE

A Warm Heart and a Good Head

WE OFTEN CONFUSE KINDNESS OF HEART WITH UNDERSTANDING, and liberalism with intelligence. It is a pleasure to report that this book[1] is full of warmth *and* understanding, liberalism *and* intelligence. George P. Elliott teaches English at Syracuse University, and I would guess that he is an excellent teacher. There is of course no reliable way to judge a teacher's performance, because it is invisible; what students say about it may or may not be competent, and a visit to the classroom tends to put the teacher, the students and the visitor in false positions. Nevertheless, we can generally tell a good teacher by his idiom, spoken or written. Elliott writes like a human being—a rather rare and difficult achievement in our day, when it seems so much more natural to write like a committee or a teaching machine. Reading his prose, I hear his speech: "It is hard to imagine ten or twelve American literary gentiles, respectable enough to get appointed to a Library of Congress committee, who could—*could*—in the same room with T. S. Eliot have opposed his nomination of Ezra Pound." There is a human being talking about literature and literary politics as human activities with serious consequences; he represents a way, not a method, of teaching.

And here is a teaching machine methodically teaching literature as something mechanical and inconsequential: "Falstaff was one of Shakespeare's most_____characters." Diligently turning the little crank that brings the correct answer into view, thousands or millions of students learn to write "complex" in the blank space, and moreover to back up this judgment with act-scene-and-line numbers, so that they can do brilliantly on an objective test without ever having read the plays or felt a desire to read them. I hasten to add that we don't teach English this way at Penn State; but more and more schools are being invaded and taken over by machines. That is what comes of yielding to the social pressure for fast, unequivocal, "correct" answers that will eliminate the questions and enable the students to achieve scholastic and professional salvation through intellectual chastity, poverty and obedience. That is what is wrong with the teaching machine: its mindless, bodiless, impersonal chastity, poverty and obedience: the fact that it settles the question once for all and dispenses us from any concern with it: the fact that it is not a human being.

For, at least in the humanities, a good teacher talks about his subject as one more or less intelligent human being to another: with as much information as he can get, with as much organization and art as he can manage, but also with personal passion and prejudice, with ex-

[1] A PIECE OF LETTUCE, by *George P. Elliott*. Random House. $4.95.

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asperation, with hatred, with love, with grief, with joy, with rage, with compassion, with indifference, with scorn, with fear, with puzzlement, with dogmatism, with skepticism, with conviction, with hesitancy, with respect, with contempt, with zeal, with weariness, with such humor as may inhere in the subject, and with such personal references as may apply. That's the way Elliott writes. That's why this book is so good.

It is by no means an orthodox book of literary criticism in any approved contemporary mode. Like Anatole France, Elliott recounts the adventures of his soul among masterpieces; but we don't live among masterpieces alone, and Elliott doesn't isolate his experience of them from the unanalyzable wholeness of his living. He has, for example, a very just and sensitive appreciation of Yeats and Blake, but he presents it in terms of his youthful experiments in reading, the puzzled, groping, gradual development of his literary instinct, his moral sense, his resistance to popular superstitions, his freedom to take or leave accepted ideas; and this is all summed up in the anecdote of how his father, a poor farmer, spent $5 of his $85 monthly income to give him a fountain pen because he wanted to be a writer; how he accidentally dropped it into the privy, and how his father, smoking a cigar as fumigant, went angrily into the night with lantern and shovel and dug it out and washed it off and restored it to him. As we approach this event indirectly through one excursus after another—on Shelley, H. G. Wells, D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer as well as Yeats and Blake—we think Elliott is rambling; but when we reach the ancedote of the fountain pen we suddenly realize that we have come to the climax of a magnificent essay whose seemingly unconnected paragraphs are fully integrated, the necessity of its connections being not that of logic but that of art.

As I read the book I kept remembering a remark about Gertrude Stein in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas:* "She always says she dislikes the abnormal, it is so obvious. She says the normal is so much more simply complicated and interesting." Elliott is fascinatingly normal. He cannot be diagrammed, and he doesn't diagram others. He takes us trudging up a nut's dusty carpeted stairway, sniffing the stale air thick with blended odors of roach powder, boiled cabbage, fried potatoes, mystic incense and dried sweat, but the nut turns out to be Yeats or Ezra Pound—that is to say, not *merely* a nut. A nut of genius, or a genius with a nutty side, sui generis and unclassifiable. Elliott does not flinch from their contradictions. I think on the whole he overestimates Pound, whose best verse seems to me nothing more than brilliant pastiche—the kind of thing our brightest English majors do considerably less well, but still the kind of thing our brightest English majors do, generation after generation, and certainly not the kind of thing Pound himself advised poets to do. Elliott's account of George Orwell's limitations as a writer and virtues as a man also seems to me somewhat oversimplified, since he ignores Orwell's anti-

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Semitism—an inconvenient fact that everybody ignores. Still, he hits the target right in the center over and over again, as when he says that Orwell was more sensitive to bad prose than to good poetry, that D. H. Lawrence's trouble was sex-in-the-head, that Edmund Wilson the critic should not be confused with Edmund Wilson the reviewer, and that Dante's contemporaries could enjoy *The Divine Comedy* more intensely than we can because they believed that the world was the center of the universe. "I find frivolous and obnoxious," he says, "the arrogance which claims that, though great writers cannot explain what they were *really* doing, esthetico-psychology can." And of a photograph by Dorothea Lange in Archibald MacLeish's *Land of the Free* he says, "The second picture in the book, of a 'Missouri farmer now a migratory farm laborer in California' crouched at the wheel of a Model-T Ford, is rescued from the too-simple, too-easy feelings which the spectacle of a trapped victim inspires, by his eyes; they gleam from that weak, fearful, narrow, pitiable face, mindless and heartless as a weasel's." Such clear honesty, though it may be partly a native endowment, is also a difficult achievement that few of us achieve. We shrink from the discomfort.

The best parts of the book, however, are the autobiographical parts: "The Sky and a Goat," "Getting Away from the Chickens," "A Brown Fountain Pen," "Coming of Age on the Carob Plantation," "Home Again," and "A Piece of Lettuce." That piece of lettuce illuminated *War and Peace* for Elliott, but *War and Peace* also illuminated the piece of lettuce. His special virtue as a critic is his willingness to talk about such illuminations. Our own lives are full of opportunities of this kind, but we don't permit ourselves to see them. Such prissiness damages us not only as critics but as people—a word that isn't quite O.K. nowadays, except for those who, like Elliott, let neither Madison Avenue nor Carl Sandburg dismay them.

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